

**ONLINE GROUP INTERACTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF VIRTUAL IDENTITY AMONG THE YOUTH IN NAIROBI  
CITY COUNTY, KENYA**

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## DECLARATION

This Thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.

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## **DEDICATION**

In loving memory of my dearest Mother **HELLEN OJWANG OMUKOBA**

Thank you for loving me greatly, for training me daily and for modeling excellence before my eyes. I appreciate the sacrifices you made to give me the best. The joy you deposited in my heart is eternal; the impact you left in my life is indelible. I honor you greatly. This thesis is dedicated to you, mum. If it weren't for the love you gave me, I never would have had the strength to walk this path.



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And now to Him who is able to keep me on my feet, standing tall in His bright presence, with triumphant joy and unspeakable delight, fresh and celebrating—to my One God, My only Savior, to Him be Glory, Majesty, Dominion and Power, now and forever. Amen

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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

|         |   |   |
|---------|---|---|
| CA      | - | Communication Authority of Kenya                        |
| CTI     | - | Communication Theory of Identity                        |
| FB      | - | Facebook  |
| FGD     | - | Focus Group Discussion                                  |
| IG      | - | Instagram   |
| ITU     | - | International Telecommunication Union                   |
| NACOSTI | - | National Council for Science, Technology and Innovation |
| NYP     | - | National Youth Policy                                   |
| RR      | - | Response Rate   |
| SNS     | - | Social Networking Sites                                 |
| SPSS    | - | Statistical Package for Social Sciences                 |
| U & G   | - | Uses and Gratification                                  |
| UN      | - | United Nations  |
| UNICEF  | - | United Nations Children's Education Fund                |
| WI-FI   | - | Wireless Fidelity                                       |
| WWW     | - | World Wide Web  |

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Affordances:** The capabilities of media convergent environment that makes it easy and possible for individuals to perform a variety of functions with the smart devices, internet applications and software at their disposal (Egede & Chuks-Nwosu, 2013).

**Blocked:** is a term used to connote an online user being barred from accessing or viewing another user's online content, including being barred from chatting with them (Ahad & Anshari, 2017)

**Blue ticked:** is a term used to connote an online member being snubbed on the online community (Ahad & Anshari, 2017).

**Browsing:** is a term used to connote the amount of time a person spends on Social Media going through content posted by others (Kaspar & Müller-Jensen, 2019).

**Computer mediated communication:** Any human communication that occurs through the use of two or more electronic devices (Anderson, 2018).

**Identity:** A complex personal and social construct, consisting in part of who we think ourselves to be, how we wish others to perceive us, and how they actually perceive us (Ahad & Anshari, 2017).

**Identity formation:** Also known as individuation is the development of the distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity in a particular stage of life in which individual characteristics are possessed and by which a person is recognized or known (Ahad & Anshari, 2017).

**Interactivity:** The state where internet users initiate and engage in vibrant discourses with each other in social network sites enabling sharing and communicating in reciprocal dimensions (such as texting, chatting, sharing photo or videos) (Ahad & Anshari, 2017).

**Lameze:** Classes that help pregnant mothers prepare for birth and how to take care of infants (Kaspar & Müller-Jensen, 2019).

**Left:** is a term used to connote a member exiting an online community without notifying the members of the group (Appel, Grewal, Hadi & Stephen, 2019).

**Online:** is a term used to connote one being present or 'seen' in the virtual space or online community (Baym, 2000).

**Online Group:** Also referred to as online community, is a group of people with common interest who create a platform within a social networking site to communicate, work together and pursue their interests over time (Commbox, 2018).

**Online group interaction:** A threaded discussion by a group through computer mediated means (Duggan, 2014).

**No Chills:** Is a term used to connote a person who says or shows anything on social media without caring about social norms or acting in a rational manner (Duggan, 2014).

**Pro-Social Behavior:** A social behavior that benefits other people or society as a whole such as volunteering, sharing, helping or donating (Durfy, 2019).

**Self-presentation:** The process of setting forth an image we want others to perceive as real (Hymas, 2018).

**Social Media:** Refers to forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

**Social Media Expert:** A social media expert is a person with qualified experience in matters concerning social media networking and one who has researched and published. (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010).

**Social Network Sites:** are defined as applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. These personal profiles can include any type of information, including photos, video, audio files, and blogs (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010).

**Troll:** It's a term that connotes someone who leaves an intentionally annoying or offensive message on Social media, for purposes of upsetting others or to get attention or cause trouble (Durfy, 2019).

**Virtual Identity:** A social identity established in online communities by an active constructed presentation of an online user (Lefever, 2013).

**Virtuality:** The created space where virtual identity is performed by online users (Maloney-Krichmar, & Preece, 2017).

**Youth:** Persons resident in Kenya in the age bracket of 15 to 30 years (Kenya National Youth Policy, 2006)

## ABSTRACT

The internet has taken the new role of community through online groups where youth congregate to interact, exchange ideas and pursue interests. As they engage in self-expression and self-presentation online, it is important to understand how virtual identity is negotiated and formed in those spaces. This research analyzed online group interaction and the development of virtual identity among the youth in Nairobi County. The objectives guiding the study were: 1) To establish the extent to which the youth are part of online groups. 2) To establish the reasons that influence the youth to join online groups. 3) To determine the extent to which online group membership develops the virtual identity of the youth. The independent variable in the study is online group interaction while the dependent variable is virtual identity development. Review of literature in this research is based on various aspects of online group interaction in relation to its potentiality in forming the virtual identity of group members. The communication theory of identity (CTI) and uses and gratification theory (U&G) were adopted to form the theoretical framework for this research. The study employed a mixed method research design in which the main methods used in data collection included; Self-administered questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions, and In-depth interviews. This study comprised four focus group discussions of ten members each sampled from two Universities in Nairobi County, a young professionals group in Kasarani sub-county and a youth support group in Mwiki Nairobi, County. Eight social media experts were interviewed. A cross-sectional survey targeting the youth was conducted in two Universities in Nairobi in which 384 questionnaires were administered to the targeted respondents. The data collected was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively based on the themes derived from the objectives of this study. Quantitative data was analyzed using the SPSS software, while the qualitative data was analyzed using the NVIVO software. The three-dimensional identity model by Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, (2008) was also used to analyze objective three of this study. Findings revealed that the independent variable of online interaction influenced the performance of users online leading to the development of a virtual identity that they are associated with. Equally the reasons for interaction online such as bonding and bridging influence the kind of self-expressions that the users exhibit online thus characterizing their virtual identity. The study concluded that because the youth are engaging online, they are performing ever-changing identities. There is therefore a need for them to be guided for positive outcomes. Equally the study made the following recommendations, firstly, online group interactions could be used positively as a platform for social interaction and change. Secondly, more online groups that address youth related matters should be created as a way of addressing this transitional stage in life. The study suggested further research in rural context and the adult segment.

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter foregrounds the main aspects of the study by way of introduction. The chapter maps the background of the study, delineates the research problem, outlines the objectives and justifies the importance of the study. The chapter also addresses the scope and limitations of the study.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Communication is commonly understood as a primary resource for enacting social identity and displaying membership in social groups (Miller, 2010). The basic symbolic interaction principle states that society shapes self which then shapes behavior (Sulimani-Aidan, Melkman, & Hellman, 2019). As society shifts and the medium of communication majorly transitions from analogue to digital; it is important to study how interactions on these online communities affect the self. Scholarly interest in issues of self-identity has exploded across disciplines within the humanities and social sciences in recent years. Common to these concerns are the assumptions that self-identity is not an a priori, not given or fixed, but created in the process of communication (Savolainen et al, 2021). Several researchers including Kaakinen et al (2020), Chan (2019), Crocetti, Rubini, and Meeus (2008) have acknowledged the importance of studying identity formation as a developmental process in addition to investigating differences between existing and new identity statuses. This also assumes that social institutions and values are produced and reproduced by individuals in interaction. Particularly important was research

conducted by Bachinni et al (2017) that developed an explicitly ecological understanding of the multiple identities self. This work showed how a change in environment (from face to face to online for example) can lead to two parallel developments of identity. This is evidenced by Dunne and Lawlors' (2010) study on adolescents' use of Social networking sites (SNS). Their study was carried out among girls aged 12 to 19 years and focused on one social networking site (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"

The need to perform an identity on the online space is not a new phenomenon in communication. According to Goffman (1959), dramaturgy is a sociological perspective that is a component of symbolic interactionism and is used in sociological analysis of everyday life. According to this perspective, individuals perform actions in everyday life as if they were performers on a stage, and their identity is performed through roles (Lumen, 2019). Each performance is a presentation of the self and that everyone seeks to create specific impressions in the minds of others. This universal drive is called impression management. Individuals manage others' impressions of them by successfully portraying themselves "onstage," or in public. People present themselves to others based on cultural values, norms, and expectations. Most of the time, people seek to meet society's expectations (Brown, 2011).

With the inception of Social networking sites (SNS) it is observed that they may have provided stronger relationship than face-to-face method which is why more young people rely on their usage than have offline interaction (Dembinska et al 2020). Through social networking sites (SNS), the youth are more willing to disclose information about themselves and to foster deeper interaction without any restrictions like how face-to-face conversation would be. For example, in the online conversation, the youth can ask deep personal questions such as someone's sexual orientation without offending the others (Favotto et al, 2017). These kinds of conversations may be harder to share with parents, relatives or even friends offline. Therefore, the youth prefer online communication than real-world contact.

In the 21st Century, there is an increasing migration to the online space, 59% of the global population is online (Clement, 2020). A good percentage of the global population online is the youth (70%) (ITU, 2017) most of whom are digital natives; who are a generation of people growing in an era of ever present technology, computer, internet and gadgets (Nikou et al, 2020). Several Researches shows that the youth account for the highest population online. A research conducted by Pew Research Center (2019) revealed that 71% of youth in America use more than one social networking site. According to Simelab (2018), 89.7% of Kenyans are internet users, while 85.6% of youth have enrolled in more than one social networking site. It therefore follows that the youth are a vibrant group online and therefore the need to study their behavior online and how their interactions on these online groups develop their identity.

The youth largely create and recreate themselves in this new environment by managing impressions. Anderson and Jiang (2018) reported that many young people acknowledge the unique challenges – and benefits – of growing up in the digital age,

while some say they at times feel overwhelmed by the drama on social media and pressure to construct only positive images of themselves online. In a study by Nguyen (2017) on the effect of social media on the youth development, majority of respondents acknowledged that excessive use of social media affects their relationship with parents and siblings at home. Majority of the respondents reported to have experienced being isolated from relatives and friends and a high percentage of the respondents reported to have become more introverted after a period of time. The social structure of the online environment has an impact on the selves that can be sustained in that setting, just the same way particular selves can be sustained in certain physical settings like school, church, or social clubs due to the nature and requirement of that environment. Whenever the youth come into contact with each other on the online space, identity questions always arise, since from a very young age they have learned how to 'read' the status and identity symbols of people (Nikou et al, 2020).

The concept of identity therefore carries the full weight of the need for a sense of who one is, together with the change in surrounding social contexts. Changes in the groups and networks in which people and their identities are rooted and in the societal structures, subject positioning, dominant societal ideologies and practices in which those networks are embedded are becoming more common and complex (Pegg et al, 2018). There seems to be a constant struggle and disconnect between who someone is, the identity their appearance performs, what they want to express and how they want to be identified. The challenge of reconciling the avowed and ascribed identity is by far a challenge that many youth have to deal with (Lawless, 2015). Identity is a complex phenomenon that takes different forms based on prevailing circumstances and the changing thereof, which is why it is very easy to be caught up in the crisis of

identity as one shifts over to the online space because they equally have to perform actions in that space. These crises create internal conflict and emotional upheaval, thereby causing the youth to examine and question their values, beliefs, and goals. As they explore new possibilities, they may form new beliefs, adopt different values, and make different choices (Morelli, 2018). It is important to note that a crisis of identity is not necessarily a bad thing, but a period of active exploration, where one attempts to figure out who they are or want to be (Zupanick, 2015).

Membership in these online groups influences how they think of themselves, how they think of others and how others think of them. These online groups impose expectations due to the constant comparison that goes on there. This comparison is used to evaluate performance, determine abilities and skills. Self-concept and self-esteem are also heavily influenced by the process of social comparison (Cherry, 2020). These comparisons can be with people who they know and interact with, with those whom they read about or see on social media or with anyone else they view as important (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014). This need for social comparison is enhanced and achieved online by certain affordances of technology, for example the use of filters affords the user the ability to change their appearance and look a certain way; the availability of maps enables the user to tag themselves to a location of their choice, the user can even adopt a pseudo name online. This social comparison occurs primarily on dimensions on which there are no correct answers or objective benchmarks and thus on which we can rely only on the beliefs of others for information (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014). This disconnect between the ascribed and avowed identity can create a crisis in the life of the individual.

According to Cherry (2019), the youth must resolve the crisis of identity. This crisis represents the struggle to find a balance between developing a unique, individual identity while still being accepted and "fitting in" (Morelli, 2018). The youth face a challenge of determining who they want to be, and how they want to be perceived by others. This challenge is hugely experienced in the social networking sites, as there is a lot of surveillance and social comparison that happens there. Erikson (1950) believes that when the youth successfully navigate this crisis they emerge with a clear understanding of their individual identity and can easily share this "self" with others; therefore, they are healthy and well-adjusted. As a result, they are confident individuals who can freely associate with other people without losing their own identity. However, when the youth fail to navigate this crisis successfully, they are uncertain about who they are. Lacking this understanding, they can become socially disconnected and cut-off from others; or conversely, they can develop an exaggerated sense of their own importance and may adopt extremist positions (Zupanick, 2014).

This identity crisis challenge is magnified with the advancement of computer technologies and the youth engagements online; we as a society have been challenged to re-evaluate how we think about ourselves, as well as the relationship between a society and its occupation of a space (Strohmeir et al, 2021). The online space is powerful enough to shape the attitude and behavior of its users thus developing their identity there. For example, The National Centre on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University surveyed more than 2000 youths from the age of 17 to 27 years old over the phone and internet in order to identify the possible factors that affect substance abuse. The findings suggested that the youth who frequent social networking sites reported three times more likelihood to drink alcohol (26% and 9%), were five times more likely to use tobacco (10% and 2%), and twice as likely to use

marijuana (13% and 7%) than youth who do not (French, 2011). Studies also suggested that an exposure to substance use imagery is correlated with onset of use (Dal Cin, Stoolmiller & Sargent, 2012). In other words, the youth who used social networking sites often are more likely to use alcohol or marijuana, and the risk is higher for those who have seen pictures of alcohol or drugs use of other peers. This speaks to the interactions that happen on these online groups and the effect they create on the youth who belong in them.

Literat (2021) observed in a study on computer subcultures, the focus was not so much on what people were doing with computers but rather how their interactions with computers led them to think differently, to feel differently, to relate differently, this was referred to as a 'romantic reaction' to computers. Computers have been helpful in showing us just how multifaceted and not one dimensional our lives are (Huang et al, 2020). New communication technologies have freed interaction from the requirements of physical co-presence and created an online presence and structure that cannot be ignored. These technologies have expanded the array of generalized others contributing to the construction of the self (Hatzipanagos & Warburton, 2013). Several research foci emerge from this development: the substance of "I," "me," and the generalized other in a milieu void of place - the establishment of online groups - which are typically "communities of the mind," and thus the negotiation of co-present and cyberspace identities (Gunduz, 2017). With the availability of diverse online groups created in cyberspace, an individual tends to portray a certain aspect of themselves in one online group that can be totally different from another or who they are in the physical environment (CAK, 2019). The use of digital media therefore has diverse and manifold consequences for young people's communication, their ways of learning, personal relationships, construction of identity, and formation of youth

cultures (Roth-Ebner, 2019). These online environments have introduced new forums for performing one's identity. The lessons learned from peoples' use of online spaces underscores how the youth construct their identities and points to ways they can more competently communicate about themselves in the mediated environment.

Given the emerging trend of online communities, it is important to investigate the kind of identity that is developed in these online spaces of interaction. Particularly important was research conducted by Bachinni et al (2017) that developed an explicitly ecological understanding of the multiple identities self. This study showed how a change in environment - from face to face to online communication - can lead to two parallel developments of identity in an individual.

According to Simelab (2018) 89.7% of Kenyans are internet users, while 85.6% of the youth have enrolled in more than one social networking site. Anderson and Jiang (2018) reported that many young people acknowledge the unique challenges – and benefits – of growing up in the digital age

Kaigwa (2013) established that many online enthusiasts at times feel overwhelmed by the drama on social media and pressure to construct only positive images of themselves. From the foregoing studies, it emerges that community youth are either losing identity or acquiring literally new identities online. Studies conducted in Kenya by Sikolia (2015), Waithaka, Ngulube and Onyantha (2015), Waithaka, (2013) and Ani's (2010), have established that high school as well as university undergraduate students, who mainly fall in the category of the youth intensively use the internet as they are constantly involved in online communication and have particular interest in social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, websites,

Instagram, Emails, Whatsapp, Imo, blogs, telegram and other social platforms. These studies however have not made a connection between the youths' interactions in online groups and its implication on the development of a their virtual identity

With few studies carried out in this new virtual phenomena, the current study was inspired to investigate more on the subject matter. This study therefore investigated whether interactions the youth have with members of their online groups, leads to the development of a unique self-online identification, referred to as virtual identity.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Online communities (or groups) have become common place across the globe. In the background to this study, it has been established that belonging to communities and interacting with members of given communities not only creates a sense of belonging but also creates members' identities, or senses of who they are. The nature of each community and the interaction that happens there constructs unique members' senses of themselves. As a new phenomenon, online communities are yet to be fully researched for their ability to foster community members' identities, or the character(s) of such identities for the members of online communities. Given the fact that the nature of online communities' members interaction is virtual, questions abound on the nature of identities formed during interactions by members of online communities (groups) as they also come from disparate socio-cultural physical communities. Previous research done on online communities has barely scratched the ground of online communities in Africa, yet it has been established that proliferation of online group membership in Africa, particularly in Kenya, is growing. It is therefore important for researchers in the field of communication to understand the reach of this online

interaction by members of existing online social groups, the characteristics of the groups Internet users join, and the reasons they join such groups. This study therefore sought to establish the level of proliferation of online group membership by the youth in Nairobi County, Kenya, the reasons that motivate them to join such groups and whether online group membership develops in the youth a virtual identity that is separate from their non-mediated identity. Knowledge gained from researching the foregoing will enable stakeholders in fields of human communication and sociology to understand the impact of consistent online social interaction for Internet users and its bearing on their selves-knowledge.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to explore online group interaction and the development of virtual identity among the youth in Nairobi County, Kenya.

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The study's objectives were, to:

1. Establish the extent to which the youth in Nairobi County, Kenya are part of online groups.
2. Assess the reasons that influence the youth to join online groups.
3. Determine the extent to which online group membership develops the virtual identity of the youth in Nairobi County, Kenya, and its implication on the non-mediated identities.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent are youth in Nairobi County, Kenya part of online groups?
2. What reasons influence the youth in Nairobi County, Kenya to join online groups?
3. To what extent does online group membership develop the virtual identity of the youth in Nairobi County, Kenya, and what are its implications on their non-internet mediated identities?

## **1.6 Justification of the Study**

The youth are a generation of people who are growing up and navigating life in an era of ever present technology. Every aspect of their life is intertwined in some way with computers, gadgets and devices. With the emergence of social media, the youth leverage these platforms for various reasons such as maintaining existing relationships, connecting with friends and relatives in diverse geographical locations or creating new social relationships (Steinberg, 2010). However, besides these positive and useful reasons, negative consequences, in particular, youth risk behaviors resulting from social media are catching research's attention. (Nguyen, 2017). It is therefore practically impossible to ignore the effects of the virtual space in relation to the youth.

Given the prevalence of these online communities and the amount of time, resources and commitment that their use has garnered; including workplace usage, community development, sensitization, social support, business growth and even risky youth behavior, it is obvious that they cannot be ignored or trivialized. It is imperative that more attention be focused on the youths' interaction in these online communities,

specifically the element of development of identity within these virtual spaces. According to Kim et al (2018), few attempts have been made to understand why people participate or do not participate in online communities. This study therefore investigated why the youth are active, dormant or even exit these online groups. This study adopted the communication theory of identity and uses and gratification approach, which gave greater insight into youth motivations for online group interaction and the development of virtual identity.

On the other hand, as the advancement of technology is evolving by the second, further studies will need to catch up with that development to determine the impact of continued SNSs use on the youth and on society as a whole (Nguyen, 2017). This therefore justifies the investigation of this study on how the youth interact on these spaces and develop unique identities there.

### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study will benefit social media researchers by establishing an understanding of the dynamics of self-expression and self-presentation in online interactions. It will look to inform them how online interactions by the youth enable virtual identity development. This study will offer insights on how online users, especially the youth, can understand and tap into the potential of online communities for interaction, information and social support.

The findings of this study will also help online group administrators establish guidelines on social responsibility with respect to matters concerning online group interactions. This study will be imperative in understanding the personality that the

online group takes as well as how it can facilitate constructive interactions online and equal opportunities for members.

More importantly, the findings of this study will be used to formulate models for valuable virtual identity formation for online users. Ultimately, the researcher has made recommendations for further research into the role of online group interaction in development of virtual identity among the youth who may be located in different environments away from the urban setting.

### **1.8 Scope of the Study**

This study focused on how the internet has taken the new role of facilitating group formation and interactions online. It looked at how online groups enable or constrain virtual identity development among the youth. The study explored the extent to which the youth feel as part of online communities and its implication on self-expression and self-presentation.

This study only examined the related phenomenon from the view point of the youth who are members of online groups and not any other group. The study dealt with issues of online presentation, behavior mimicry, fashioning identity and impression management.

### **1.9 Limitations of the Study**

The online groups were not listed or registered therefore the study relied on online groups that were known and identified through word of mouth by current members of existing online groups.

### **1.10 Assumptions of the Study**

The study commenced with the standard assumptions as:

- 1) The researcher assumed that there is pervasive access for online services by the youth in Nairobi County, Kenya.
- 2) The researcher also assumed that collection of data using both snowballing and purposive approaches would enhance willingness in sampled respondents to freely participate in the study.
- 3) The researcher assumed that the scope of the study would remain unchanged to enable her gather consistent data.
- 4) The researcher assumed that the budget for the study would remain within manageable levels till completion of the study.

### **1.11 Chapter Summary**

Chapter provided a thorough background of the problem by discussing the key issues among the youth and online interactions with a global, regional, and local contextualization. It also identified the purpose of conducting the study in addition to highlighting the research questions it intended to answer; it also defined the nature of the study. In the next chapter, two, a review of related literature on youths and online interactions will help create a conceptual framework for the study while establishing gaps from other studies that anchor this current one.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, literature review focused on elements of virtual identity development that characterized the youth who are members of online groups in order to explain the key variables presented for analysis in this research. Relevant instruments on online group formation and inclusion were explored to enable the researcher to gain proper understanding of the concept of online groups in relation to the youth. Recent research studies related to virtual identity development within online group formations were reviewed and a research gap identified. The chapter included the theoretical and conceptual framework on which the research was founded.

### **2.1 Flow of Literature Review**

The review of literature is based on the following ideas that are thematically aligned and tethered to the objectives of the study. These areas include:

1. To establish the extent to which the youth are part of online groups.
2. To establish the reasons that influence the youth to join online groups.
3. To determine the extent to which online group membership develops the virtual identity of the youth and its implications on non-internet mediated identities.

### **2.2 The Youth and Online Groups**

The growth in internet penetration in Kenya over the past five years, has been so rapid that the country has been branded 'silicon savannah' (Mullins, 2018). A report released by Mwangi (2019) shows that Kenya is leading Africa in Internet Penetration at 83%. The report, that states the country's population to be over 52.2

million, also reveals significant growth in the number of internet users from 200,000 in the year 2000 to 43 million users by 31st March 2019. The increase in internet penetration for the last nine years hence stands at an impressive 21,564 percent. In the social media stakes, Kenyans are ranked second only to South Africans (Kaigwa, 2013). According to the quarterly report by Communications Authority of Kenya (2019), mobile penetration in Kenya stood at 88.1% with 37.8 million subscribers. The internet data market registered 21.6 million subscriptions. The findings show that Kenyan youth spend the entire day online through mobile gadgets. Herbling (2012), corroborates the latest statistics by the Communication Authority of Kenya which show that mobile Internet account for 98.8% of the total data subscriptions. Recent trends tend to uphold this view as indicated in the CAK Report (2019) which reported 91% (46.94M) penetration of mobile subscriptions in Kenya, compared to 80% mobile penetration in Africa and internet connectivity, at a penetration rate of 84% with 43.3M of the total population having access to the Internet in Kenya. A survey on youth attitude show that Kenyan youth spend the biggest portion of their income on mobile phone airtime, since this youthful population has an increasing disposable income resulting in higher purchasing power (CAK Report, 2019). A study by Thoene (2012) reveals that social media usage has increased and that trends indicate that the most common social media sites is Facebook, where people are able to connect with one another on the sites. This is reflective of the Kenyan environment since the percentage of Kenyan youth active on Facebook and Twitter is 76 and 61 per cent, respectively (Herbling, 2012). Latest report by CAK (2019) states that, higher mobile and internet penetration has led to the growth of social media users among the youth, with the most used social media platforms identified as Whatsapp (74%), Facebook (70%) and Twitter (50%), based on users own claimed activity. The distance-

transcending technologies of the electronic age have enabled people to initiate, escalate, and maintain interpersonal relationships to degrees that were once considered possible only when two parties shared common physical space (Baym, 2015) .

### **2.2.1 Youth and Internet Connection**

Teenagers and the youth throughout the country regularly use the internet, cell phones, and video games to gather information and communicate with each other. This ability to interact with others is the unique feature of social media which provides powerful new ways for the youth to create and navigate their social environments. The Youth' use of social media occurs simultaneously with their developing identity, emerging sexuality, physical development, and moral consciousness (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell & Purcell, 2010).

Studies conducted in African countries by Akakandelwa and Walubita, (2018), Waithaka, Ngulube and Onyancha (2015), Waithaka, (2013) and Ani's (2010), have established that university undergraduate students, have particular interest in social media and form the highest population online. Studies conducted in Asia by Devi and Roy (2012), Gomez et al (2017), investigated the internet use pattern among the students in Universities in India and found that about 71 percent of the students used internet for their academic related activities and about 29% use it for communication purposes. Studies conducted in America by Brouwer (2018), Smith. et al (2011) and Williamson (2010) showed that 92% of 18-24 year olds who attend college are internet users.

### **2.2.2 Related Studies on Youth and Internet Connection**

More than half of all online American youth have created personal profiles for social networking on the Internet (Mazur & Richards, 2011). Their counterparts in Kenya are likewise active on social media spaces at 85.3% (Simelab, 2018). Findings by Ortiz-Ospina (2019) have shown that 73% of American teenagers have used a social networking site, while the statistics in Kenya show that young Kenyans aged between 16 and 24 are constantly on their cell phones – texting and surfing the Internet – and send an average of 250 messages as texts and chat posts daily (Herbling, 2012). This corroborate with a recent study by Kenya Mobile Report (2019) which indicated that Kenyan youth spend up to three hours a day on social media. In 2019 approximately, about 97% and 93% of girls and boys respectively in America had access to a smartphone. Overall, teens are very well connected and perform most online activities via mobile in the United States (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). These findings open questions about a similar scenario occurring in the less developed nations like Kenya for the current study.

Social media now permeate every aspect of society from politics, work, communication habits, news consumption, to dating, among others (Shirky 2011). As more of humanity comes online (2.3 billion more people in 2016–2017 alone), a fundamental and spontaneous restructuring of our collective behavior is occasioned (Comstock, 2016). An essential part of this is the emergence of a new framework of understanding and adapting to the rapid waning of our legacy institutions such as the traditional communities and aspects of them being replaced by other branching futures as such online groups. This means that as we flow our information, money, goods, and services through digital systems, these systems have a high likelihood of manifesting useful emergence of networks and communities (Comstock, 2016). Many

ideas have appeared in the media and research regarding online communities. The internet has been regarded as a set of services to be consumed, and users of these services are regarded as consumers; thus communities formed on or supported by the internet are regarded as consumption communities (Sima et al, 2020).

### **2.2.3 Online Communities and Youth Internet Connection**

There is no consensus regarding online communities. Some believe that the consumers of internet newsgroups and discussion groups may derive both knowledge and communion from one another, though they acknowledge that internet groups also entail the conflict, factionalism, gossip, and envy that characterize human interactions in most contexts (Zeinalli, 2019; Rheingold, 1993; Sulimani-Aidan et al, 2019). Lefever, (2013) argues that online Communities provide real-world communities a place to come together using the Internet. But others argue that computer networks are not real communities because they are formed based on choice rather than on necessity, because they tend to consist of demographically similar and privileged members, and because they can easily be exited (Wang et al (2019); Kumar et al, 2018). Online communities tend to be named by the activity and people they serve or the technology that supports them. For example, the same community might be called a ‘breast cancer patient support community’ and a ‘bulletin board community (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2017). A gap therefore exists in research into the types of online groups existing in Kenya and how online interaction there is happening. This research, therefore, sought to fill the apparent knowledge gap not only by analyzing the contribution of the internet in online group formation and its potential benefits to youth but also understand the presence and impact of the youth online.

## **2.3 Factors that Influence Subscriptions to Online Groups**

Pioneers of online community development and research Rheingold (1993) and Hiltz (1985) used the term ‘online community’ to connote the intense feelings of camaraderie, empathy and support that they observed among people in the online spaces they studied. Other researchers have attempted to operationalize the term so that it is useful in the analysis, design, and evaluation of community software platforms and management practices (Fields et al, 2017; Maloiy & Cranefield, 2021; Sri et al, 2017). These researchers focus on ‘the people who come together for a particular purpose, and who are guided by policies (including norms and rules) and supported by software. Theories of broader Internet use have indicated both entertainment and searching for friendship or romance as motivational forces for joining online groups (Burkell & Regan, 2021). Analyses by UN Chronicles (2017) suggest that two of the main reasons why the youth go on social media platforms are to network with others and to meet new people, which puts the youth in a unique position to engage with people from diverse backgrounds and countries. A study conducted on social media and human relation, reported that the youth uses social media for various reasons such as maintaining existing relationships, connecting with friends and relatives overseas, and creating new social relationships (Nguyen, 2017).

### **2.3.1 Social Media and Internet Connection**

Social media have been credited with building connections among both heterogeneous groups and closely knit homogenous communities (Meeus et al., 2010). Abbas and Mesch (2018) claim that users of SNSs primarily use the platform to connect with people they already know in real life, while Westling (2007) views the group function of SNSs as bringing users into contact with many people who are unknown to them.

Perrin (2015) found that social media usage had experienced explosive growth between 2005 and 2015. As of late 2016, Facebook for example had grown so populous that it was no longer considered just a social network. Through changes in the atomic content contributions of its two billion plus users, the network began to embody other roles such as, a de facto political organizer, a major news source, a global video distribution platform, and a marketplace for goods and even jobs (Comstock, 2016). The internet therefore creates platforms where people can engage with others who share values like their own. This ability to create segments of people with like-minded interests and values, provides individuals - especially the youth - with a means for acquiring that feeling of inclusion, and thus creates community and a common identity.

### **2.3.2 Social Media and Networking**

Online subscription and use of social networking sites is affected by various variables such as gender, age, level of education, socio-economic status, as well as geographic location (Saeed, 2016). In the online sphere, the youth are also the age group that uses social media most frequently. Overall, they are more likely to be social networkers than people aged 35 and older. For example, 79 per cent of young Internet users in Germany use social media, while only 39 per cent of older users in the country do so (. The difference between younger and older users is similar in other countries such as Viet Nam (86 per cent compared to 49 per cent) and Japan (78 per cent compared to 43 per cent). In Kenya 78% of the youth are engaged online while for those over 35 years its 34% (SimeLab, 2018).

The youth are self sufficient in some ways; however, they require assistance in other aspects of life (Vaterlaus et al, 2019). Life events that can traditionally occur during

this period include: attending college to earn undergraduate and/or graduate degrees, entering the workforce, returning home for financial help from parents or getting married and starting their own family (Vaterlaus et al, 2019). Youth is the time where life becomes extremely busier with more activities and plans that they have lesser time to interact with others. In other words, their time becomes more limited, social media therefore offer immediacy and interactivity in communication, two highly desirable attributes for young people, that form a part of young adults daily routines (Abbas & Mesch, 2018).

Owing to the responsibility and decisions that accompany the aforementioned life events, this period can be a time of instability, uncertainty, and life change. The youth experience higher-level thinking and more complex thoughts than ever before, allowing them to deal with concepts like diversity and their own role in understanding the world (Rokach, 2020). This higher-level thinking, paired with more difficult decisions, complicates the decision-making process. As individuals transition to adulthood, they require a lot of help that is non-judgemental (Harder et al, 2020). Many of the traditional barriers to seeking help are reduced in online settings (Ivancic, *et al.*, 2018).

### **2.3.3 Social Media and Networking**

The internet is a key source of advice and support for young people, who are likely first to seek help on an online site rather than talk to a counsellor, peer or parent. Anything a young person would be embarrassed or ashamed to ask their peers or parent about-such as sexuality and mental health, or relational matters-they are likely to ask the internet. Ortiz-Ospina (2019) reported that social networks are a key source of information and advice, 57% of young adults said that they looked to their online

social network for advice. These online forums are also preferred because people can view the stories of others before risking to talk about their own stories. The internet in most cases can also be the first contact with information about adult issues, such as careers, relationships, sex, investments or contraceptives. Online sources therefore offer a quick fix for those already well aligned with the digital world (Ilioudi *et al.*, 2012). In a study conducted by Ivancic, *et al.*, (2018) to determine the youth perspective on being online one of the respondents said:

I think online chats and instant messaging were probably the first places I went when I felt down. Being able to chat with other young people but also having that security of anonymity meant that you could talk about anything. When I went to find more formal help I was lucky, 'ReachOut' an online group that addresses issues of the youth, was one of the first places I found and I've never looked back.

A study conducted by Griffiths *et al.*, (2015) shows that online peer-to-peer support groups are a main resource of social support on the Internet. In such groups, members usually have some sort of shared burden, and they use the online group as a platform for exchanging knowledge, sharing personal experiences, providing and receiving sympathetic understanding, and establishing social networks. Similar reasons for membership may be found in many online communities, including professional, educational, social, or recreational communities. However, online support groups are differentiated by virtue of the centrality of emotional support provided to members, which may be marginal or nonexistent in other online communities. For example, a list of Kenya's top ten online communities places a consumer protection group at the top (Buyer Beware), followed by a gossip online group (Kilimani Mums) then a group for sharing 'crazy stuff' (kenyatalk.com) and (Business ideas 101) an investment

ideas group (Mwanza, 2019). The question is: is the dynamics of customer/client service the main reason why huge populations of people in Kenya are members of online groups or what really is discussed in that group. The other question to ask is do Kenyans join online groups to gossip since a gossip group is ranked second in this country, or what really is discussed in that online group that draws many people to it? This research therefore sought to fill the apparent knowledge gap by analysing the reasons why the youth in Nairobi subscribe to online groups.

#### **2.4 Online Groups, Virtual Identity Development and Non-Mediated Identities**

According to social identity theory (Hogg, 1996) people form a social identity of values, attitudes and behavioral intentions from the perceived membership in distinct self inclusive real or imagined social groups. An individual's self-identity typically results from the membership in a pre-existing self inclusive social group, including vocation (Hogg & Terry, 2000) and avocation (Underwood, Bond & Baer, 2001). These motivations for joining traditional, face to face groups can be extended to membership in online groups. One of the foundational issues in establishing a sense of virtual identity has to do with the degree to which people feel they are able to experience a connection to others through technology. The human perception is extremely important in establishing this connection.

##### **2.4.1 Social Groups and Virtual Identity**

According to Kang et al (2019), the sense of "being there" that many report experiencing while engaged in the online realities communicated through cyberspace can be explained in terms of telepresence. Telepresence essentially points to the extent to which one feels present in the mediated environment, rather than in the immediate physical environment. This sense of 'being there' is enhanced by the quality of vividness, which refers to the amount of sensory information the medium

makes available to a person. For example applications like Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram allow for the sharing of pictures, videos, emojis, voice recording and other related features like filters, locations that create a collection of senses engaged and the extents to which any one of those senses is stimulated. This creates a sense of realism, and this same sense is enhanced by the degree of interactivity the medium affords to people. Identity therefore deals with the question of ‘who am i’ which usually refers to further questions of belonging and of locating oneself in social contexts (Carroll, Jiang & Zhang, 2010).

An identity is a complex personal and social construct, consisting in part of who we think ourselves to be, how we wish others to perceive us, and how they actually perceive us, (Ackerman, 2019). Crocetti, Rubini, and Meeus (2008) proposed and advanced a three-dimensional identity model which focused on the dynamics by which adolescents form, evaluate, and revise their identities over time. The model was used to study how adolescents in Italy and Netherlands developed identity while at school (the social domain) because this is where they spend most of their time and interact with their schoolmates (interpersonal domain).

#### **2.4.2 Social Groups and Commitment**

The three-dimensional model (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008) posits three dimensions as under-lying identity formation. These include: Commitment, In-depth exploration and Reconsideration of commitment. Commitment involves enduring choices that the adolescents make in various developmental domains and the self-confidence they derive from these choices. In-depth exploration refers to the extent to which they explore actively their commitments, reflect on them, and discuss their choices with other people. Reconsideration of commitment includes the comparison of present commitments with alternative commitments because the current ones are

no longer fulfilling. This model was deemed fit in studying how the youth develop a virtual identity in online groups (the social domain) in the process of online interaction (interpersonal domain).

Online communication continues to serve as a medium for uniting an even more geographically dispersed population by fostering a common identity among them. Literat (2021) suggested that the process of — disembodiment facilitated by computer mediated communication, and the associated detachment from time and space, opens up scenarios in which the idea of — multiple selves, advocated as a defining feature of contemporary life reaches its fullest realisation (Okyere, 2020). In the early years of the World Wide Web (WWW), there seemed to be no limit to the number of different identities that could be enacted online. Such possibility, according to Literat (2021), allowed many to deal with very real psychological issues, as the active exploration permitted online seemed to provide an unexpected therapeutic route to the resolution of psychological conflicts off-line. In fact, Literat (2021) suggests that online environments allow people to move into personal issues. In a study conducted by Duggan (2014), 68% of the participants said the online environment was more enabling of social support and welcoming to both genders.

However, manipulating one's identity is nothing new. Even in online communications fashioning identity is still a perennial concern of human civilization. It was Goffman's (1959) contention that everyday life was a performance of sorts, and that our behaviors and attitudes could be explained in terms of a theatrical metaphor. Accordingly, Goffman wrote of how people adopted particular roles when they were in public view by putting on a face. The effort people invest in "staying in character," as it were, Goffman calls face-work, noting that people are persistently attending to the requirements of a particular face lest they break the image of their role.

### **2.4.3 Social Groups and Character Formation**

The importance of "staying in character," or presenting a gratifying identity online among the youth cannot be overemphasized. Harrison and Thomas (2009) defined identity as "the way in which users develop their online profiles and lists of friends to carry out important community processes". They further outlined aspects of identity 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 online groups in which they participate, and (d) bridging of online and offline social networks, which is concerned with the degree to which the social networking sites (SNS) becomes an integral part of the users' actual life while offline (Harrison & Thomas, 2009). Roux (2020) echo this by arguing that among the process gratifications sought by the youth include the need for image, fashion and status.

This interrelatedness of the individual's sense of identity and society is evidenced by the individual's/ actor's acute awareness of the audience. Goffman explains this awareness in terms of front stage and back stage behaviors. Front stage actions are those that are visible to the audience and are part of the performance, while back stage actions only occur when the audience is not around (Lumen, 2019). An example of this would be a person putting up a luxurious lifestyle online when in reality they live a normal or marginal lifestyle. This disconnect between the self-online and self-offline led to the coining of the phrase - 'kwa ground vitu ni different' - by Kenyan youth, to refer to the fact that what you see online is not always the reality offline.

#### **2.4.4 Social Groups and Demographic Identity**

To some degree, we can control what others know of us by making some choices in life, yet certain qualities of our identities are predetermined for us. In face-to-face interactions, people infer qualities of our identities based on our gender, race, clothing, and other nonverbal characteristics (Kumar et al, 2018). Because many of these cues are invisible online, Internet technologies offer us the possibility of controlling more aspects of our identity for public consideration than has been possible before. Individuals manage others' impressions of them by successfully portraying themselves "onstage," in these online groups, since they know that they are before an audience. The online world is a safe haven for exploring different values and beliefs and for testing out new personas, and ultimately seeing how others react to them (Hogg & Rinella, 2018). On the other hand, since anonymity is an online affordance it can change the salience of personal identity and social identity, thus have a profound effect on behavior. Anonymity can have strategic consequences, and can affect the ability for people to express their personal and social identities (Bruner et al, 2017). Similarly, Valenzuela et al (2020) argue that anonymous conditions within a group setting can cause people to lack awareness of who they are as individuals, which facilitates deindividuation. Arpaci et al (2018) placed strong emphasis on anonymity as the cause of diminished concern for self-evaluation, which enables individuals to act with disregard for following societal norms of behavior, what the youth refer to as 'no chills'. This attempts to explain some of the bizarre behaviours that are witnessed online by individuals, especially the youth who would otherwise not act the same way in a social environment governed by rules and values. This anonymity especially in online groups leads to mob behavior where a group of otherwise normal people transform into a raging, obscene and even violent mass (Paskuda & Lewkowicz, 2016). For example in a study conducted in the United

States, one in ten youth admit to ever engaging in some form of cyberbullying behavior (Anderson, 2018). Numerous studies on traditional bullying shows that the rate of bullying is higher in middle school because the youth want to establish their status in society (Wang et al, 2019). In a study conducted in Vietnam it was observed that people who are living in the countryside seem to have lesser engagement with cyberbullying. This can be explained by the lack of electronic gadgets such as computer, laptop and smartphones. Given the complexity of society and advancement of technology, more cyberbullying cases happen as it allows anonymous attacking (Nguyen, 2017).

With some of the face to face cues not available online, and the many affordances of the online space at their disposal, how do the youth then use online interactions to construct an identity and what kind of impression management do they put up online that determines the identity that they embody there? And what implication does this online identity have on the individual's offline identity? This research, therefore, sought to fill the apparent knowledge gap by analyzing the evidence behind how virtual identity is formed in computer mediated environments as the youth interact in these online groups in Nairobi County, Kenya.

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

In this subsection of the study, key theories guiding the whole exercise are highlighted including the anchor and supporting theory. These includes the stating of theory, the assumptions, criticism and justified usage of each theory as applied to the current study both in global and local context.

### **2.5.1 The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI)**

The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) was developed by communication scholar Michael Hecht in 1993. The theory was developed based on theory and empirical data suggesting that communication is an element rather than just a product of identity. The communication theory of identity expands the notion of identity to view it as layered (Faulkner & Hecht, 2007). From this theorizing emerged CTI's definition of identity as the multilayered ways that individuals and communities socially construct themselves. Seeking to view identity as more processual and multi-layered, Communication Theory of Identity presents a more comprehensive or synthetic view of identity integrating community, communication, social relationships, and self-concepts, while locating identity in all these layers.

The basic overarching propositions that define identity are: Identities have individual, social, and communal properties. Identities are both enduring and changing. Identities are affective, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation. Identities involve both subjective and ascribed meaning. Identities are codes that are expressed in conversations and define membership in communities. Identities have semantic properties that are expressed in core symbols, meanings, and labels. Identities prescribe modes of appropriate and effective communication. Identities are a source of expectations and motivations. Identities are emergent; they are obtained when we enter into relations with others who have identities. This layered perspective views one's identity formation and management as an ongoing process of communication with the self and with others rather than as a simple product of communication or basis for producing communication (Hope et al, 2019).

The theory posits that individuals internalize social interactions, relationships, and a sense of self into identities through communication. As the youth communicate online they develop a sense of their self-online and this self is what they manage and express and it becomes their virtual identity. In turn, identity is expressed or enacted through communication. In other words, the relationship between communication and identity is reciprocal; the way one communicates online forms their identity there, and the identity formed there determines how one communicates. From this perspective, communication helps build, sustain, and modify one's identity. The theory was found fit for the study, since it articulates this reciprocal relationship which enables the development of a unique identity online. This theory was applied in data collection particularly in the designing of focus group discussion questions geared to finding out how the youth communicate online as opposed to how they communicated offline. Each participant's viewpoint was analyzed as a trend or generalization of their identity online. The responses given were analyzed according to what meaning and pattern they contribute to the virtual identity of the youth.

The Theory has been successfully used by other scholars in their study, an example being Matig (2018) in his dissertation on the effects of messaging on the health behavior decisions of recipients, with an understanding that being healthy is an 'identity'. The theory has also been used by Reimenschneider, Buche and Armstrong (2019) to examine the perceived challenges men face in the information systems workplace.

Although CTI proponents mainly considered the effects of various communication contexts beside online ones, this study offers the CTI as an identity-based approach to studying how online communication by members of virtual groups may lead to the

identity formation of individual members. The theory provides a framework for understanding how the inter-relation of layers of identity play off each other. These layers include the personal layer, the enactment layer, the relationship layer and the communal layer (Golden, 2015), all of which may merge in the process of online communication between members belonging to the same online groups. Hence, this study applied CTI within the context of online interactions to assess how identities are developed during online interactions.

From the findings of the study, the researcher discovered that the main shortcoming of CTI theory lies in its inability to address the significance of the motivation communicators have in the choice of platforms through which they interact. This study therefore incorporated a second theory that was deemed sufficient enough in facilitating the capturing of data related to the reasons why the youth join online groups for interaction with others.

### **2.5.2 The Uses and Gratification Theory (U&G)**

The study therefore, adopted the uses and gratification theory (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). U&G research has its foundation in communication research, originally focusing on motivations for choice of mass media and mass communication (Ling & Pedersen 2003). The proponents of U&G argue that the technique is suitable for studying new communication technologies. As Perks and Turner (2019) put it, since new technologies present people with an increasing number of media choices, motivation and satisfaction become even more crucial components of audience analysis. Reiss et al, (2021) maintain that to focus fully on the social and cultural impacts of new communication technologies may be premature until we have grasped exactly how and why people are making use of these media channels.

This approach focuses on the consumer - the audience member rather than the message. The theory visualizes the audience member to be a discriminating user of media. The audience is assumed to be active and goal directed. The audiences are largely responsible for choosing media to meet their own needs. The media are considered to be only one factor contributing to how needs get met, and the audience members are assumed to have considerable agency or in essence know their need and how to gratify those needs. The U&G approach was propounded by Katz et al., (1974). The underlying assumption is that audiences are active and they seek out that content which provides the most gratification (Fawkes & Gregory, 2001). Fawkes and Gregory (2001), further added that “the level of gratification depends on the level of need or interest of the individual”. Katz et al., (1974) added that 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” .This model informed the present study in the sense that, (a) the youth have social and psychological needs, which (b) determine the Gratifications Sought (GS) through specific online groups and (c) have expectations of the different online groups available, which (d) influences them to access these online groups, (e) and engage in different online activities, resulting in (f) gratifications obtained (GO) and, (g) other consequences (both positive and negative), mostly unintended, gained through the interactions with members of the online groups they joined.

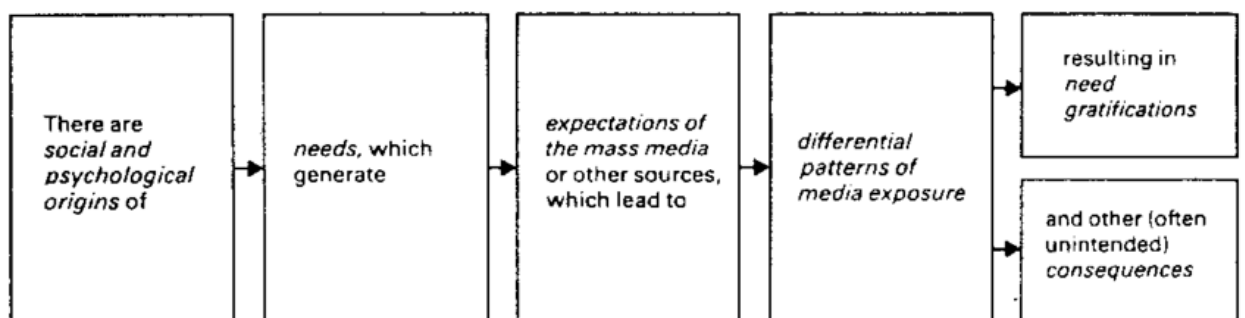
The Theory has been successfully used by other scholars in their studies on online communication, an example being, Sikolia (2015) in his thesis on factors influencing the choice of social networking sites among high school teenagers in Nairobi County.

Roux (2020) applies this theory in examining uses and gratifications of mobile internet among South African Students.

The main criticism of the U&G theory is that measurement of the audience of any media usage is almost impossible and that the word gratification suggests greed to a large extent as opposed to satisfaction. As observed by among others, Egede and Chuks-Nwosu (2013) the selected results of audiences are difficult to correlate since not all people can attest to same satisfaction or gratification on any given subject in the media. Another criticism of U&G is that the assumption of rationality by users is not real and that what is apparently satisfactory to person A might be the extreme opposite of what person B appeals even if they are in the same group environment (Ahad & Anshari, 2017). However, U&G theory is still a useful tool for evaluating reasons behind online users' choices of communication or integration platforms, for example online groups. Hence, this study applied U&G theory to mine data related to Objective 3 of the study.

The theory is modeled by McQuail and Windahl (1981), as illustrated in Figure 2.1.

This theoretical model was adopted for this study.



**Figure 2.1: Uses and gratifications model**

**Source:** Fawkes and Gregory, 2001

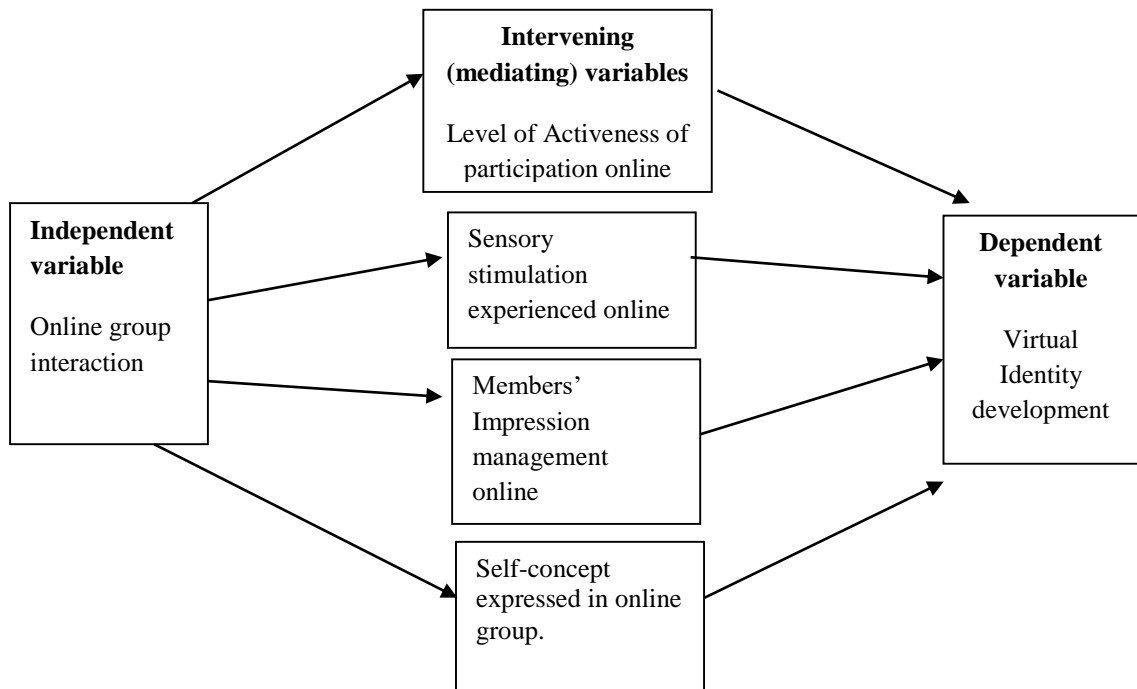
## **2.6 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 2.2 shows the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. In this study the independent variable was online group interaction, whereas the dependent variable was virtual identity development. The intervening variables were: level of activeness online, sensory stimulation experienced online, members impression management online, self-concept expressed online.

In this study online group interaction was assumed to develop virtual identities of the group members. The intervening variables were used to interrogate the respondents' online communication in order to determine whether these mediating variables had any influence on the relationship between the independent and dependent variable. According to Communication Theory of Identity, identities are codes that are expressed in conversations and define membership in communities. The researcher therefore sought to establish whether there were words, phrases or expressions mentioned in the process of data collection and content analysis that represent: level of activeness online, sensory stimulation experienced online, member's impression management online, self-concept expressed online and how they influenced the identity that the respondent developed online.

When the online group interaction is intervened through a high level of activeness online – that is a member posts a lot online or they engage a lot through chatting – the possible outcome is a high contribute to the development of a virtual identity, whereas if their level of activeness is low to dormant the possible outcome is, it contributes

less to the development of a virtual identity. If the online group interaction is intervened through the use of sensory stimulation tools such as pictures, videos or audio recordings, the possible outcome is that it contributes to the development of a virtual identity. Similarly, if the online group interaction is exposed to sensory stimulating experiences with others online. The possible outcome is that it contributes to the development of a virtual identity. Likewise, if the sensory stimulation experienced online is low, the possible outcome is that it contributes less to the development of a virtual identity. If the online group interaction is intervened through the management of impression online - through the use of elements like filters, pseudo names, fake locations and posts – the possible outcome is that it contributes to the development of a virtual identity, likewise if they don't then the possible outcome is that it contributes less to their virtual identity. If the online group interaction is intervened through self concept - that is communicating one's belief about political, religious or social issue, their values and convictions – the possible outcome is that it contributes to the development of a virtual identity. While if they don't communicate their self-concept then the possible outcome is that it contributes less to the development of a virtual identity.



**Figure 2.2: Conceptual Framework on Virtual Identity-‘Created by Researcher’**

## 2.7 Chapter Summary

In chapter two, a review of literature based on the objectives of the investigation was established. The chapter commenced with an introduction of the theoretical review, conceptual framework, and review of the study variables. In chapter three the focus will draw attention to the research methodology including the design, population, sample, techniques, and analysis utilized.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This Chapter highlights the methodological issues that were considered for this study. These include: the research design, target population, sample size and sampling techniques, data collection instruments, techniques and procedures for data analysis, data management and ethical considerations.

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopted a mixed method qualitative and quantitative research design. The rationale for mixing is that neither qualitative nor quantitative methods are sufficient by themselves to address the elements of the research (Yin, 1989). This can be applied currently to such an extent as to which youth are part of online groups and how online subscription develops the virtual identity of the youth. Yip (2020) defined a mixed method research design as, one that puts side by side or combines methods of different types to provide a more elaborate understanding of the phenomenon of interest.

They justified the use of mixed method research design by arguing that such combinations are used to enable confirmation or corroboration of each other through triangulation. Bryman (2010) argued that the use of triangulation enhances confidence in the ensuing findings. This is corroborated by Creswell (2014) who argues that the mixing or blending of data provides a stronger understanding of the problem or question. This is echoed by other scholars who argue that, the problems addressed by social and health science researchers are complex, and the use of either quantitative or qualitative approaches by themselves is inadequate to address this complexity

(Creswell, 2014). The foregoing arguments therefore justified the use of this research design in the study. The quantitative method was used to collect and analyze data for objective one, while the qualitative method was used to collect and analyze data for objective two and three.

### **3.2 Target Population**

The target population for this study was youth in Nairobi County aged between 18-26 years and who were members of an online group. The age bracket was determined by the National youth policy of Kenya, that defines a youth as persons resident in Kenya in the age bracket of 15 to 30 years (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2017). This study looked into the virtual identity development of the youth in online groups. Specifically, the age, institutions of learning as university, access to the internet, access to smart phones, living or having direct access to the city where internet is prevalent and use internet more often compared to the rest of the other counties. The study also considered Wi-Fi connected devices, good basic computer and Internet skills, use of the internet as a daily routine and that the internet has always been part of their world using virtual experience as well as internet usability. These youth set trends and agenda for online discussions through twitter handles and chatting groups, attracting live interactive discussions by all members connected to them online. Therefore, it was important to collect and analyze the nature of interaction they often encountered on their daily online group communication experiences and how it shapes their virtual identity.

### **3.3 Sampling Procedures**

Ministry of Youth affairs (2020) reported that the youth constitute 33 percent of the population in Kenya. In the 2019 census the Kenya population was at 47.6 million. The population in Nairobi County was 4.4 Million. The population of youth in

Nairobi County is at 29% of the County's population (National Youth Population, 2020) thus the population of youth in Nairobi stands at an estimated 1.2 million ., UNFPA (2020) reported that the youth who have access to stable and consistent internet are estimated to be 28% making that population to stand at 357, 280 . The study worked with 384 respondents from three sub-counties. Data from the selected sub-counties answered to the general demographic profiles of the respondents as well as objective one. The study also used snowballing and purposive sampling. The participants for the interview were purposively picked while the participants for the FGD were picked through snowballing sampling procedure.

### **3.4 Sample size**

In this study, the quantitative sample size was determined according to Cochran (1977) formulae designed for large populations. In Cochran's formula, any population of more than ten thousand (10,000) people is considered infinite, and the sample size is calculated using the formula:

$$n = Z^2 \cdot P \cdot q / d^2$$

Where, n = sample size,

Z = the value at the chosen confidence interval (1.96 for a confidence interval of 95%),

P = estimated population with attributes of interest which if infinite p = 0.5,

q = 1-p, and d = degree of desired precision (0.05 will be used in this study).

Therefore, the sample size n for this study was:

$$(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times (1-0.5) / (0.05)^2 = 384.16.$$

The study therefore targeted 384 youth in three sub-counties in Nairobi. In addition, the study also worked with forty eight participants for elicitation of qualitative data.

The sample was derived from three sub-counties in Nairobi including Kasarani,

Mwiki and Githurai. These sub-counties were selected because they were representative of all socio-economic classes of youth. Also, their proximity to many institutions of learning where the youth are prevalent was a factor. Out of the forty-eight participants, forty of them were clustered into four focus groups of ten members each. The decision was guided by the rule of the thumb for determining size of focus groups (Reisner et al, 2018). The rule of thumb recommends that appropriate focus group size is between 6-10 participants purposively drawn from a homogeneous population. A small number of participants is encouraged in order to maintain active and effective participation in the discussion. This is because it may be difficult to exercise control in a group of above ten members. The rule of thumb guiding the number of focus groups for study recommends that 3- 5 focus groups are enough for saturation. Adler et al (2019) point out that for social sciences, more groups seldom provide meaningful new insights. The data collected becomes repetitive and, eventually, superfluous. The participants discussed questions in the focus group discussion guides prepared for the study. This particular sample was used to acquire the information required for objectives 1, 2 and 3 in this study. The nature of study required intensive FGDs with both youth users and social network experts since it was possible to get rich information in a group discussion as opposed to single respondents.

The study sample also included eight other key informants representative of social media experts, who were purposively sampled. A social media expert is a person with qualified experience in matters concerning social networking and one who has researched and published. These respondents were interviewed using the interview guides: these participants were purposively picked as they were deemed resourceful

by virtue of the respective roles they play in behavioral studies, content development and research. This sample also led to collection of data for objective two and three in this study. To arrive at an adequate sample, the study worked with forty-eight participants. Forty of the participants were drawn from four focus groups of ten members each. These groups were identified through snow ball sampling method for ease of getting members of virtual groups. The study also used eight other participants who were social media experts. These eight participants were purposively sampled. This method is a non-probability procedure, commonly applied in studies that adopt qualitative approach. In purposive sampling the researcher selected participants for possessing specific characteristics that were informative in relation to the population of interest. Similarly, this criterion was applied in order to identify important sources of information because of their specific knowledge in online communications and virtual group formations.

### **3.5 Methods of Data Collection**

The following procedures were used to collect data in this study: self-administered questionnaires, focus groups discussions and interviews.

#### **3.5.1 Self-Administered Questionnaires**

Questionnaires are considered advantageous in data collection because they are less costly and can capture more sensitive information from respondents than interviews, due to rapport that develops between the respondent and the survey instrument (Mathers, 2013). They are also preferred because reading comprehension is higher than aural comprehension needed in an interview which takes much longer to interpret and respond to (Lee & McKinney, 2013). Questionnaires were administered to the selected sample of 384 respondents. These respondents were in classrooms or social

youth clubs. The researcher accessed these groups through the lecturers and leaders in charge. After making contact with them we agreed on a specific date and time when the questionnaires would be distributed as well as how long the exercise would take. The data collection process would take a maximum of twenty minutes. The researcher distributed the questionnaires with the help of two research assistants. The process was generally smooth, even though some of the participants would walk away without returning the questionnaires or they would return questionnaires that were not fully answered. We therefore distributed a total of 480 questionnaires in order to arrive at the required sample size. After the questionnaires were coded the proportionate sampling was as follows:

**Table 3.1 Proportionate Sampling of Study Sample**

| <b>Gender</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|---------------|------------------|----------------|
| Male          | 182              | 47.4           |
| Female        | 202              | 52.6           |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>384</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |

### **3.5.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):**

This method was deemed advantageous because it is useful to obtain detailed information about personal and group feelings, perceptions and opinions which were telling about who they were, or who they wanted to be online. It also saves time and money compared to individual interviews and provides a broader range of information as it offers the opportunity to seek clarification (Nyimba et al, 2018).

The researcher worked together with two research assistants. The research assistants were charged with the responsibility of contacting the class representatives and group leaders for purposes of setting up the focus groups. Once the groups were formed and the time confirmed the researcher was informed of the agreed date and time for conducting the discussions. The discussions were held immediately after class sessions or club meetings as it was easier to gather the participants then, even though it would take a while for them to come together and settle down. The discussions would run for an hour to an hour and a half. Four different sessions were held at different locations, these sessions had ten participants each. In each group discussion guides were used to collect data. These groups involved in-depth conversations with the researcher guiding the groups' interactions. The researcher would ask the question from the discussion guide and the floor would be open for responses. The members would then have up to three minutes each to respond to a question. The researcher made sure that other respondents did not interrupt one another during presentation but each member had to wait for their own turn to speak. This was a little bit challenging because some questions would generate heated discussions and participants would interrupt each other. The researcher therefore had to appropriately guide the discussion to avoid missing out on what was being said. The research assistants recorded the conversations using a voice recorder and the researcher and assistants also took field notes during the discussions.

### **3.5.3 Interviews**

This method was deemed advantageous because it investigates issues in an in depth way, enabling discovery of how individuals think about a topic as well as the opinions that they hold (Mather, 2013).

Interviews were conducted with eight social media experts, who specialize in online content development, and communication research. This group was deemed more suitable since its members have a greater understanding of the online space, the interactions that happen there as well as the behavioral dynamics and psychology associated with online interactions. The respondents were approached prior to the interview through email, phone call or face to face interaction. The researcher gave a brief of the research being conducted and an overview of the questions to be asked. Once the identified respondent understood and agreed, the researcher then requested to set a suitable date and time to conduct the interview. The researcher then conducted the interview on the set date. During the interview the researcher once again gave a brief of the research being conducted, and then began asking the questions. Data from this group were collected using interview guides. The responses were recorded using a voice recorder as well as taking of field notes. The researcher engaged the experts for purposes of exploring topics in great depth and probed the respondents and prompted them for further information. For the purpose of getting real online participants, snowballing was used to help introduce participants to each since the virtual nature of their interactions involved lots of secrecy or privacy in their operating environments.

### **3.6 Validity and Reliability**

As a validation measure, the study survey questions' face value was established by experts in the field of research. The researcher also conducted a pilot study using 25 respondents in the target location and, to ensure validity, the questions were carefully worded and revised after the pilot test, as was found necessary. Reliability was attained by ensuring that all the steps taken in this research could be replicated in a separate study.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

This research generated both quantitative and qualitative data, and therefore integration of these different types of data was done. The researcher first reported the quantitative statistical results followed by qualitative texts or themes. Before processing the responses for quantitative data, filled out questionnaires were serialized and checked for completeness and consistency and then coded to enable responses to be grouped into various categories for easy analysis. Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) was used to generate tables. The researcher did not intend to infer from this statistics beyond this profile which targeted objective one. Written and recorded discussions from interviews and FGDs were also analyzed using the NVIVO software. The data was transcribed according to emerging themes in view of the study objectives and research questions. A three dimensional identity model was used in analyzing data for objective three (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008). The study examined the data for patterns that displayed the theme of; commitment to a particular self-presentation online. Commitment here refers to enacting enduring choices with regard to the social domain (the online group) and the self-confidence respondents' derive from these choices. The study also examined the data to determine the respondents' in-depth exploration which represents the extent to which they think actively about the commitment to the identity they present online. The study finally examined the respondents' reconsideration of commitment which refers to the comparison of present commitments to a virtual identity with possible alternatives because the current commitments are no longer satisfactory. Reconsideration of commitment combines loosening existing commitments with broad exploration of new possibilities. This was analyzed to find out whether existing commitments to a virtual identity were secured during a process of reconsideration.

Or if during the reconsideration process, one's present commitments to a virtual identity were deemed to be inadequate and were discarded in favor of a new virtual identity.

### **3.8 Data Management and Ethical Considerations**

Approval for conducting this research was granted after the proposal document was submitted to the University for Research Ethical Review and approved. The researcher then sought research authorization from National Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and a research authorization (Appendix VIII) and Research permit were granted (Appendix IX). Informed consent was sought from all respondents and participation was voluntary. The researcher's identity and intention of the study was communicated before the discussion forums were conducted, and interview guides and questionnaires administered. The rights of the participants were respected and their identities remained confidential and anonymous. The research assistants were trained on their roles in collecting the raw data. During the discussion forums the research facilitator recorded the responses using an audio recorder. Also field notes were taken in the process just to ensure that anything said was not missed or recorded wrongly. Confidentiality and dignity of participants, online groups and institutions was assured during and after the study. The information collected was used for academic purposes only, as data in this research report. Personal information of respondents was treated with confidentiality during and after the research. Although the study was dealing with human subjects, they type of data solicited was not extremely sensitive and personal. However, in the spirit of research ethics, all data collected was treated with utmost care by the researcher.

### **3.9 Chapter Summary**

Chapter three aimed at establishing the study methodology giving the various methods and procedures the researcher adopted in conducting the study. The chapter also showed the research design that was adopted for this study including target population, sampling design, the research instruments used, the research procedures, and the data analysis methods. The ethical considerations, which included: authorization and permit for conducting the research, were granted by National Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). The next chapter gives the results derived for data analysis.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents findings on online group interaction and development of virtual identity among the youth in Nairobi County Kenya. The findings are organized according to the themes and subthemes derived from the objectives of this study. The results are discussed in the following order: firstly, demographic information of the respondents, mainly focusing on age, gender, level of education, and online expenditure; secondly, statistical data on the extent to which the youth in Nairobi County, Kenya, are part of online groups; thirdly, assessment of the reasons that influence the youth to join online groups; and lastly, determination of the extent to which online group membership develops virtual identity of the youth in Nairobi County, Kenya and implications of online group members' virtual identity on their lived circumstances offline as social beings of the physical world.

Data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Demographic data was analyzed using quantitative analysis while all other data relating to online interaction by members of the studied groups analyzed using qualitative analysis methods, namely content and thematic analysis. Specifically, images supplied by the online media groups' members' during their online communication were treated as key data in the study because these presentations were symbolic by their look, design and messages and carried direct and latent meanings. They represented how their senders felt, wanted to appear to fellow group members and how they wished to appeal to them. Therefore, the images were extensively used in the study since they constituted core data capturing items indicating how communication happened in the studied

online groups, thus proving to be the elements of identity signification for various aspects concerning the personalities and other attributes of their senders.

#### **4.1 Response Rate (RR)**

Data for the study was collected from the youth in two Universities in Nairobi County, a young professional group in Kasarani, and a youth support group in Mwiki Nairobi County. A total of 484 questionnaires were distributed to these institutions, which was over and above the sample size of 384. After gathering participant responses through the distributed questionnaires, data were reviewed for cleanup purposes. Data were removed for a variety of reasons including: (1) survey incompleteness, (2) incompleteness of the written primer question, and (3) if a participant reported an age below 18 years, or above 26 years of age. After the data cleanup process, 384 participants remained in the dataset for analysis purposes. The analysis was done using the SPSS Version 23 statistical software system.

#### **4.2 Social Demographic Data**

The first section of the questionnaire consisted of four closed ended items, which sought to determine the demographic characteristics of the youth. The first item, which was considered introductory in this section sought to establish the gender of the respondents. Data collected for this item is presented in the table below.

Table 4.1 Presents gender of the respondents.

**Table 4.1: Gender**

| <b>Gender</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|---------------|------------------|----------------|
| Male          | 182              | 47.4           |
| Female        | 202              | 52.6           |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>384</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |

There were a total of 384 participants, of which (52.6%) were female while (47.4%) were male. This corresponds to a study by Vermeren (2015), which argued that women are biologically wired for social networking and they use social media to share more personal information than men. Typical of the women empowerment movement where women are becoming more and more open about their issues, no longer are women blindly submissive or oppressed in silence. Women have become more and more vocal especially on social media platforms. This is affirmed by one of Kenya's leading online groups dubbed 'Kilimani Mums' which runs both a Facebook and WhatsApp group. The online group brings together women from all walks of life. The group is about everything that is right and wrong with feminism, empowering the girl child, governance, and sexual freedom, including that of speech and association. They have formed perhaps the most interesting online community, where women go to vent, gossip and seek advice about anything and everything (Mukei, 2017). The group generally unleashes a certain wild side of women that you rarely see. The feminine wisdom and camaraderie is what makes the group so addictive (Mukei, 2017). Women use these sites to reveal more about their personal lives, while men use

social media sites for business, sports or politics. Gentina et al (2021) reported that girls are more likely than boys to talk with friends on the Internet about romantic relationships, secret things, and deep feelings.

The second demographic analyzed was the age of respondent as presented in Table 4.2

**Table 4.2: Age of Respondents**

| <b>Age Brackets</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 18-20 years         | 194              | 50.5           |
| 21-23 years         | 151              | 39.3           |
| 24-26 years         | 39               | 10.2           |
| Total               | 384              | 100.0          |

The ages of the majority of respondents enrolled into the study were between 18-20 years representing (50.5%). In this study, (39.3%) of the respondents were in the 21-23 age bracket followed by those in the 24-26 at (10.2%).

Findings from Table 4.2 show that youth aged between 18-20 years formed majority of the respondents. This could be attributed to the fact that millennials (those born in 1980-1995) are early adopters of social media and first to wholeheartedly embrace these platforms as a main form of communication. Most Millennials were still in school when they started to get social accounts so they look at social media as a place where both their personal and professional lives can flourish (Durfy, 2019).

The findings correspond with those of a study by Pew Research Centre (2019) where it was reported that (72%) of online 18-25 year olds use social networking websites, which is significantly higher than the (39%) of internet users ages 30 and up who use these sites. Lenhart, et al (2010) further argued that young adults aged 18-25 year old go online at a rate equal to that of teens both at (93%). They also have a cell phone that has internet access thus this group tends to be more present online.

Table 4.3 presents the highest level of education of the respondents

**Table 4.3: Highest Level of Education**

| <b>Level of University Education</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Primary                              | 2                | 0.5            |
| Secondary                            | 17               | 4.4            |
| College                              | 153              | 39.8           |
| Undergraduate                        | 210              | 54.7           |
| Postgraduate                         | 2                | 0.5            |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>384</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |

Findings in Table 4.3 indicate that out of the 384 participants, a majority, rated at (54.7%) were undergraduate students while postgraduates and primary levels accounted for the lowest at (0.5 %). The secondary level accounted for (4.4%), while the college level was at (39.8%). It was clear that respondents in the undergraduate and college level were more accessible and willing to participate in the research. This

is mostly because college and undergraduate students account for a vast majority of the youth in Nairobi County.

These findings concur with a study conducted by Atas and Celik (2019) which revealed that smartphones ownership was high among higher education students. The results revealed that the students use their smartphones on the campus for surfing the net (88%), social networking (88%), accessing academic services (78%), and e-mailing (69%). When compared to laptop, netbook, tablet/e-reader, and iPod use, smartphones are the most used mobile equipment on the campus.

The findings also agree with National Research Council, (1999) which reported that the internet has gradually become the main vehicle of scholarly communication since the introduction of the World Wide Web. The internet enables students to communicate with other students (even abroad) and to share ideas, knowledge, experiences and cultural practices. It enhances the skills and capabilities of students, and assists them in their studies and professional lives (US Department of Education, 2017). The internet has equally become a place for experimentation; a number of college going students have begun internet based businesses whether it is retail, online writing or blogging. These mobile computing devices help the students to access information quickly (Gikas & Grant, 2013).

Findings on internet expenditure per month for the respondents are presented in Table 4.4

**Table 4.4: Internet Expenditure per Month**

| <b>Expenditure(In Ksh)</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 0-500                      | 113              | 29.4           |
| 501-1000                   | 121              | 31.5           |
| 1001-1500                  | 94               | 24.5           |
| 1501-2000                  | 33               | 8.6            |
| Above 2000                 | 23               | 6.0            |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>384</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |

Results in Table 4.4 show that majority of the respondents (31.5%) spend between Ksh 501-1000 shillings per month on internet access. (29.4%) of the respondents spend between Ksh 0-500 shillings per month on internet access, whereas (24.5%) of the respondents spend Ksh 1001-1500 on internet access per month. Those who spend Ksh 1501-2000 were (8.6%) and those who spend above Ksh 2000 were the least at 6%. Sanni (2016) reported that though Kenya remains a leader in mobile internet penetration in Africa, and also has one of the best quality internet services in the region where most users have access to 3G and 4G networks, prime internet is still not affordable, with Kenyans paying more for data than their peers in Uganda and Tanzania. This explains the reason why most youth in Kenya can only afford to spend between five and ten dollars a month to access the internet. Bearing in mind the hard economic times, the youth may find it challenging to invest more money in their internet use when they have not met other basic needs. It should also be noted that

most youth are heavy internet users when they have access to free Wi-Fi, thus they do not spend their personal money buying internet bundles but rather depend on these free hotspots that may be stationed in the school. Over the last decade the government has invested in ICT and Internet infrastructure development. In 2009, Kenya was the first country in East Africa to connect to international fiber optic. The government also introduced policies to encourage Internet adoption, such as connecting universities to the cables as well as the introduction of tax exemptions for mobile devices in 2009, leading to a 200 percent growth in mobile devices in Kenya (Nitsche, 2019).

### 4.3 Online Presence

Findings on subscription to social networking sites (SNS) for the respondents are presented in Table 4.5

**Table 4.5: Subscription to SNS**

| <b>Number of SNS</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1-3                  | 104              | 27.1           |
| 4-7                  | 204              | 53.1           |
| 8-11                 | 41               | 10.7           |
| 12-15                | 7                | 1.8            |
| Above 15             | 28               | 7.3            |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>384</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |

Results in Table 4.5 show that majority of the respondents (53.1%) have subscribed to four to seven social networking sites, while (27.1%) of them have subscribed to

between one and three social networking sites. Those who have subscribed to between eight and eleven were at (10.7%), while between twelve and fifteen were at (1.8%) and the remaining (7.3%) of the respondents have subscribed to above fifteen social networking sites. These findings corroborates with a study by SimeLab (2018) which revealed that there are more than five popular social networking sites in Kenya. These include: Facebook, with over seven million active users. YouTube with over eight million active users; Twitter with over one million active users; WhatsApp, over seven million users; Snapchat with over one million active users and Instagram with over four million active users. This explains why over (50%) of the respondents have subscribed to between four and seven social networking sites.

Participant 01/2019 in the focus group discussion said:

*If you are not in multiple social media platforms, you feel 'Fomo' Fear of missing out. You feel like you are missing out because conversations tend to be filled with statements such as, 'did you see so and so on Instagram?*

*This or that is trending on Twitter*

*She posted pictures on her Facebook*

*So you feel like you must be 'everywhere!*

*When you want to talk to someone, they will mostly say, 'ingia online' (avail yourself in the virtual space)*

Participant 02/2019 on the focus group discussion said:

*When you admit that you are not in some social media platforms like Instagram; famously known as IG or Twitter, or Facebook, famously known as FB, people are always surprised and says, 'that's where everyone is*

*nowadays! In fact people are more easily found online, that's where people meet and chat'*

It is important to note that individuals must first be members of a social networking site (SNS) before they can be incorporated in an online group. These online groups are creations made from existing social networking site. For example a person can have a thousand friends on their Facebook page but be on a Facebook online group with only two hundred people. It means that even though he or she shares a social networking site with a thousand people, he only shares an online community with two hundred of them. It's similar to living in a city of ten million people but only identifying with five hundred of them.

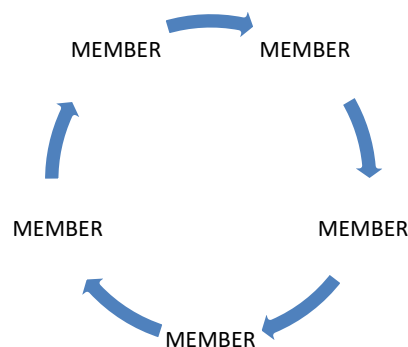
Findings on membership to online groups for the respondents are presented in Table 4.6

**Table 4.6: Online Group Membership**

| <b>Number of groups</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1-3                     | 209              | 54.4           |
| 4-7                     | 105              | 27.3           |
| 8-11                    | 41               | 10.7           |
| 12-15                   | 18               | 4.7            |
| Above 15                | 11               | 2.9            |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>384</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |

Results in Table 4.6 show that majority of the respondents (54.4%) are members of one to three online groups, while (27.3%) are members of between four and seven

online groups. (10.7%) of the respondents are member of between eight to eleven online groups, while (4.7%) are members of between twelve to fifteen online groups. (2.9%) of the respondents are members of more than fifteen online groups. These findings concur with Appel et.al (2019), who suggests that the future of social network interaction is online group chatting. Applications that afforded users group interactions such as WhatsApp deliver a range of benefits, including breaking down the traditional hierarchies that can stunt effective communication within a team (Commbbox, 2018). These online groups provide methods of communication that are efficient as they enable members who are fragmented by physical boundaries to come together and interact. Individuals online are known to form groups as platforms that facilitate interactions and create efficient avenues to communicate to an increased number of people with the same agenda. It embodies the circle network of communication which is a form of group exchange that builds a network of relationships, a sense of community, through practices of active listening, intentional speaking, and conscious self-monitoring. Circle communication emphasizes individual contribution while building consensus to fulfill the purpose of the group (Michaels, 2002).



**Figure 4.1: The Circle Network of Communication**

Respondent 03/2019 from the focus group discussion revealed:

*I really don't know of any youth in my circle who is not a member of an online group, that's just how we live!*

Respondent 04/2019 also observed that:

*You just must be in many online groups because people are talking about different things in these groups.*

Findings on active online group participants for the respondents are presented in Table 4.7

**Table 4.7: Active Online Group Membership**

| <b>Group members</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1-50                 | 83               | 21.6           |
| 51-100               | 105              | 27.3           |
| 101-150              | 44               | 11.5           |
| 151-200              | 46               | 12.0           |
| Above 200            | 106              | 27.6           |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>384</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |

Results in Table 4.7 show that majority of the respondents (27.6%) are members of active groups which constitute over two hundred participants. Those with fifty one to hundred active participants constitute (27.3%). One to fifty active participants are (21.6%). One hundred and one to one fifty active participants were (11.5%), while one fifty one to two hundred active participants were (12%). The findings reveal that

the number of members in a group is not a sure way to determine the activeness of a group. It may vary, it does not mean that if a group has many people then the group is automatically active neither does it mean that if a group has less members it becomes automatically dormant.

Findings on dormant online group participants for the respondents are presented in Table 4.8

**Table 4.8: Dormant Online Group Membership**

| <b>Group members</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1-50                 | 218              | 56.8           |
| 51-100               | 71               | 18.5           |
| 101-150              | 37               | 9.6            |
| 151-200              | 22               | 5.7            |
| Above 200            | 36               | 9.4            |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>384</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |

Results in Table 4.8 show that majority of the respondents (56.8%) are members of dormant groups which constitute fifty participants and below. Those with fifty one to a hundred active participants constitute (18.5%). One hundred and one to one fifty dormant participants are (9.6%). One hundred and fifty one to two hundred dormant participants were (5.7%), while above two hundred dormant participants were (9.4%). The findings show that the lesser the members the more dormant the group. It follows that if the available people to communicate are minimal then the possibility of the group being dormant can be high.

Findings on duration as an online group member for the respondents are presented in Table 4.9.

**Table 4.9: Duration as an Online Group Member**

| <b>Duration in months</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|---------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 0-12                      | 73               | 19.0           |
| 13-24                     | 92               | 24.0           |
| 25-36                     | 73               | 19.0           |
| 37-48                     | 79               | 20.6           |
| Above 48                  | 67               | 17.4           |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>384</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |

Results in Table 4.9 show that ninety two of the respondents (24%) have been members of these online groups for more than a year. While (19%) have been members of these online groups for a year and below, (20.6%) have been members of these online groups for three to four years, (19%) have been members for two to three years and (17.4%) have been members of these online groups for over four years. The findings reveal that the youth stick to these online groups for a while but as they progress into the third and fourth year (2%) of them exit the groups for various reasons. Nevertheless, the turnover in these online groups is not high; members tend to stay committed to the groups with a few fallouts. It therefore follows that not so many people exit a group that is ‘alive’.

Participant 05/2019 said:

*I have been a member of my high school online group for over five years now, and I think I will be a member for life!*

Participant 06/2019 revealed:

*I have been a member of a photography group for three years, I don't have any reason to exit, and I learn a lot from this group. I am also a member of my extended family WhatsApp group; I don't think I will ever exit that one*

Findings on hours spent online a day for the respondents are presented in Table 4.10

**Table 4.10: Hours Spent Online a Day**

| <b>Hours</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| 0-3          | 87               | 22.7           |
| 4-7          | 136              | 35.4           |
| 8-11         | 84               | 21.9           |
| 12-15        | 21               | 5.5            |
| Above 15     | 56               | 14.6           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>384</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |

Results in Table 4.10 show that majority of the respondents (35.4%) spend between four to seven hours online. Those who spend between zero to three are (22.7%), while those who spend between eight and eleven hours online are (21.9%). (5.5%) of the respondents spend between twelve to fifteen hours online, while those who spend

more than fifteen hours a day are 14.6%. These findings concur with Hymas, (2018) in a study by Ofcom data, which reported that, almost a fifth of young people aged 16 to 24 are so addicted to their smartphones that they spend more than seven hours a day online.

For all adults, the proportion spending over 40 hours online has quadrupled, from 5 per cent to 19 per cent since the iPhone was launched in 2007. Among 18-26 year olds, it rises to 33 per cent. Three-quarters of the age group spend more than a day a week online (Hymas, 2018).

Participant 07/2019 in the focus group discussion revealed:

*I spend too much time online; I think I need like counseling or something, because every time I am away from my phone I feel weird.*

Participant 08/2019 also revealed:

*I know I spend a lot of time online because it's the first thing I do when I wake up, and the last thing I do before I sleep. I also check my accounts very many times in the day, like every five minutes. Honestly even when I wake up in the middle of the night to go to the toilet, I still check my phone for notifications and end up browsing for hours!*

The youth are primarily on their phone all the time. Up to 15% of them spend more than half of their day locked up in their phones. It is the place where they live, and they constantly go there to become alive. It is practically impossible to separate them from the virtual space. Social media overuse has become a form of behavioral dependence on social media platforms. This compulsive use of social media continues

to be the way of life for many youth resulting in significant impairments in an individual's function in various life domains over a prolonged period (Griffith & Kuss, 2011). Participants like 07/2019 feels weird when they are disconnected from their phones or the virtual space, they feel lost. Participant 08/2019 reveals that the youth have a need to constantly connect with the virtual world. The participant attests that they can only survive outside the virtual space for five minutes, even when they wake up in the middle of the night they have to connect to the virtual space to check what is going on there.

Social media has become a source of aliveness for many youth; it is almost as though they are dead, clueless or dormant without it. It is the place where they connect with others, it's the place where they express themselves, it's the place where they seek solace and find entertainment, belonging, advice and comfort.

In an interview with Social media expert 1, she said:

*Engagement with social media is very thrilling for the youth, that's why when they get a text or notification it feels good. It's why the youth count the likes and even buy them or do crazy things to increase them, it's gratifying. It's why they get down when their Instagram or Facebook pages are slower or a little bit inactive. The trauma of being unfriended by their peers or blue-ticked on WhatsApp is real for them. These social media sites are highly addictive. They are addicted to the social approval, the recognition, the socialization and affiliations they have online.*

Findings on active participation in the online group for the respondents are presented in Table 4.11.

**Table 4.11: Active Participant in Online Groups**

|                   | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree    | 105              | 27.3           |
| Agree             | 96               | 25.0           |
| Neutral           | 154              | 40.1           |
| Disagree          | 24               | 6.3            |
| Strongly Disagree | 5                | 1.3            |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>384</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |

Results in Table 4.11 show that majority of the respondents (40.1%) are neutral participants in the online groups. (27.3%) of them strongly agree that they are very active participants in the online groups that they are in, while (25%) of them agree that they are active participants in the online group. (1.3%) of them strongly disagree that they are active participants while 6.3% of them disagree that they active participants in the online groups. These findings concur with Chang et al (2020) in a study on online travel community which reported that, participation in the online travel community was driven mainly by social and hedonic benefits –which are types of gratifications - while level of active contribution can be explained by three instrumental, efficacies, and expectancy related incentives.

Participants 08/2019 argued:

*I tend to be active in the online group when the group is active, or when the topic being discussed is interesting, so I mostly go with the flow!*

Participant 09/2019 observed:

*I am active when the group is active, and am dormant when the group is dormant*

Participant 10/2019 revealed:

*When people stick to the agenda of the group, I tend to be active; also when the values of the group resonate with my values, I am active. But when people deviate from the group agenda, and like start advertising stuff, or posting 'bad pictures' I just become dormant or exit the group or block the person*

Findings on dormant participation in the online group for the respondents are presented in Table 4.12.

**Table 4.12: Dormant Participant**

|                   | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree    | 20               | 5.2            |
| Agree             | 26               | 6.8            |
| Neutral           | 157              | 40.9           |
| Disagree          | 101              | 26.3           |
| Strongly Disagree | 80               | 20.8           |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>384</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |

Results in Table 4.12 show that majority of the respondents (40.9%) are neutral participants in the online groups. (26.3%) of them disagree that they are very dormant participants in the online groups that they are in, while (20.8%) of them strongly disagree that they are dormant participants in the online group. (5.2%) of them strongly agree that they are dormant participants while (6.8%) of them agree that they are dormant participants in the online groups.

Participant 11/2019 argued:

*When people in the group are like not my type, I tend to be very dormant.*  
*When they like talk about stuff I don't relate or don't like that much, I tend to be dormant.*

The findings here correspond to the findings on active participation. Being dormant in a group is not a feature of the individual but a feature of the group. The personality that the group embodies determines how active or dormant the group members will be. These groups are designed to encourage group exchange that build a network of relationships and create a sense of community (Van Laar et al, 2017) when that sense of community is lost in individualism or agendas that are contrary to the group's core values then naturally the members fizzle away in silence or they simply exit. The groups must be seen to practice active listening, where all members are heard and respected, intentional speaking; where members speak in line with the group's agenda and values, and conscious self-monitoring; where members do not promote themselves above the group/community. As participant 10/2019 clearly puts it, when people stick to the agenda of the group then the group is active. Activeness in a group

is achieved when individuals contribute while building consensus to fulfill the purpose of the group (Van Laar et al, 2017).

#### **4.4 Reasons Influencing Youth to Join Online Groups**

In analyzing this objective, each participant's viewpoint was looked at as a trend or generalization of identifying the reason for joining an online group. If a participant's opinion/s imparted a cultural meaning/characteristic and major pattern then it enabled the researcher to understand the elements that draw the participants to the virtual world and thus was selected as a reason for online group membership. To objectively comprehend the participants' reasons for joining the online groups, the participants were asked questions in a focus group discussion forum, where they aired their views, were open about their experiences and gave examples from their virtual contexts. To objectively comprehend the participants' reasons, it was important for the researcher to organize her own subjectivity appropriately and reflect on whether it facilitated or impeded objective comprehension of the participant's world. An appropriate methodology was adopted in order to solicit complete meaningful evidence that was used to test the validity of hypothetical concepts. In this way the researcher was warranted in believing that the concepts illuminated the true nature of the participants' reasons and the central themes-which are the constructions of the researcher that go beyond the participants' literal words and objectively summarize the psychological meanings that the participants' expressed in the narratives and that represented the psychological significance of the meaning units. The narratives were elicited from the questions asked during the focus group discussions and the interviews with social media experts which were analyzed qualitatively. These questions were

#### 4.4.1 What Influences Youth to Join an Online Group?

From the responses of the participants in the focus group discussions' question: what are some of the online groups that you are part of? It was evident that the participants were members of: family groups, academic groups, social groups/support groups, religious groups, political groups and entertainment groups.

FDG question; what are some of the online groups that you are part of? Elicited the following responses

*Communication and media group, psychology class online group, gender group, family group, cousins group, church group, Muslim group, drama, football, job posting group, friends group, first time mums, nursing mothers group, sports group, football group, rugby group, photography group, betting groups, Bungoma County group, glam my home, Jubilee supporters, Kilimani mums.*

As part of what influences them to join these online groups, the participants responded as follows:

Participant 12/2019 explained:

*Since I am a first time mother and a student, I join online groups that support first time mothers. I join those groups to gain insight on issues such as breastfeeding, infant care as well as what other mothers from across the country say about their experiences and challenges of being a first time mother. I learn a lot from these groups since I don't have someone here, like a close relative to constantly advise me as a first time mother. Neither do I have the money to go for Lamaze classes. I therefore rely on these online groups for information, advice and support.*

Image 4.1: First Time Mothers Online Group

Like Comment Share

**First time mothers** September 29, 2018 at 6:32 PM · Facebook for Android · 🌐

f your baby is constantly coughing especially at nights /ou may need to check it out. Excessive coughing can be an early sign of asthma or it could be that your child simply needs to be kept warm. A pair of... [More](#)

livingston macy's Walmart carter's

Mothers, did you know that cabbage leaves are not just for eating? Yes you've heard it! Whenever your breasts are extremely engorged and gets really painful just take out a cabbage leaf and put it in your bra.

"Cabbage leaves are used by some women to help reduce breast inflammation and relieve the pain and discomfort that breast engorgement, an overabundant supply of breast milk, or weaning a baby from breastfeeding can cause. Researchers do not know if there is a property within the cabbage leaf itself that helps to decrease the pain and swelling, or if the inflammation goes down because the cabbage acts as a cold compress.

Either way, studies show that if you're breastfeeding and you put the refrigerated leaves of a cabbage plant directly on your breasts, it's not only soothing, but it can also help lessen your breast pain and swelling".  
<https://www.verywell.com/cabbage-leaves-breastfeeding-and-breast-engorgement-431593>

Message

Participant 13/2019 from the focus group discussion said:

*I love photography, therefore I joined a group of other photographers across Kenya to gain experience from them, to learn the different angles that other photographers take their pictures from as well as learn more about cameras. This online group has inspired me to take great pictures as I study other photographers' work. It has helped me to advance my skills without paying the extra cost which is something I cannot afford at the moment.*

Image 4.2: Photography Online Group



#### Studio items sale

1. Selens 16 rod umbrella 165cm. 8,050
2. Gd strip soft box 22x90. 8,050
3. Godox x1 pro nikon trigger. 6,650
4. Selens Heavy duty C-stand. 12,600
5. Air cushioned light stand. 4,200
6. Studio stool. 4,550... See More



Between 60d and 70d which is the best in video quality?

3 Comments



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**Kenya photographers association**



Jan 1 at 10:07 PM • 🌐

Best of Africa sunset

📷 by Moh [redacted]



These online groups enable the youth to access information and support that may not be easily accessible within their physical spaces. People like participant 12/2019 are able to access information about breastfeeding from other first time mothers across the country. These online groups create social relationships of exchange between people with shared interests but contrasting social identity. For example, participant 13/2019 interested in photography can garner professional information from experts in the field, even though he is not at their level, status or region. These online groups therefore act like bridges that connect people together, moving information and support to members connected there. According to Liu (2017), bridging social capital functions to bring together disparate members of the community. Bridging social capital provides low socio-economic status individuals with the potential to access resources outside of their constrained environment. Bridging enables people in virtual communities to share information and receive support from others with whom they share interests or similarities. For low socio-economic status groups, it is akin to Nan Lin's concept of "upper reachability" in social networks, i.e. the ability of socioeconomically disadvantaged groups to access valued resources such as information and instrumental assistance (Williams (2019)). For example, participant 13/2019 is not able to pay the extra cost needed for him to perfect his photography skills, but through this online photography group he can access that information from privileged others (professional photographers) for free. Equally participant 12/2019 does not have the resources to join a Lamaze class neither does she have a social support in her physical environment who understand the stage she is in. these online groups therefore provide an avenue to bridge that gap that exists in the physical spaces of the youth. Indeed access to bridging capital can be conceptualized as one of the distinguishing hallmarks of socioeconomic privilege afforded in the virtual space,

as it's able to connect a community of similar individuals and shield them from the stigmatization from friends and family (Jaynes, 2020).

According to Ministry of Finance Kenya (2012), the Kenyan youth face numerous challenges which include: limited access to information, unemployment, lack of finance, lack of skills and limited access to affordable credit facilities and exclusion in decision-making processes. Policy implementation in youth affairs is a big challenge since it requires effective coordination of different agencies due to its multi-sectorial nature. Due to this, other parties that have a major interest in youth development have become very instrumental, these includes: Non-state actors, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, faith-based institutions, and community groups, such as online groups which play important roles in youth development (Wleh, 2015). These online groups provide such avenues where the youth can connect to the more privileged in society and through this bridging process they can access knowledge, support, a sense of belonging and ultimately succeed in their various fields of interest.

A participant 14/2019 in the focus group discussion revealed:

*I joined a group from my home town – Bungoma - because I feel connected to them. I understand the things they talk about. The conversations about development in our county as well as the leadership its always interesting, more so when they speak in my mother tongue, I feel at home...I feel at home away from home, when am here in Nairobi!*

Participant 15/2019 explained:

*I am part of the online groups to connect with my long-time friends like my high school online group where we talk about our high school experiences; like the teachers we liked, it makes me feel connected to my high school family*

*and I like that. Even though we live in different locations, in this group we even organize how to meet for re-unions, or support each other in the high or low moments of life.*

### Image 4.3: High School Online Group

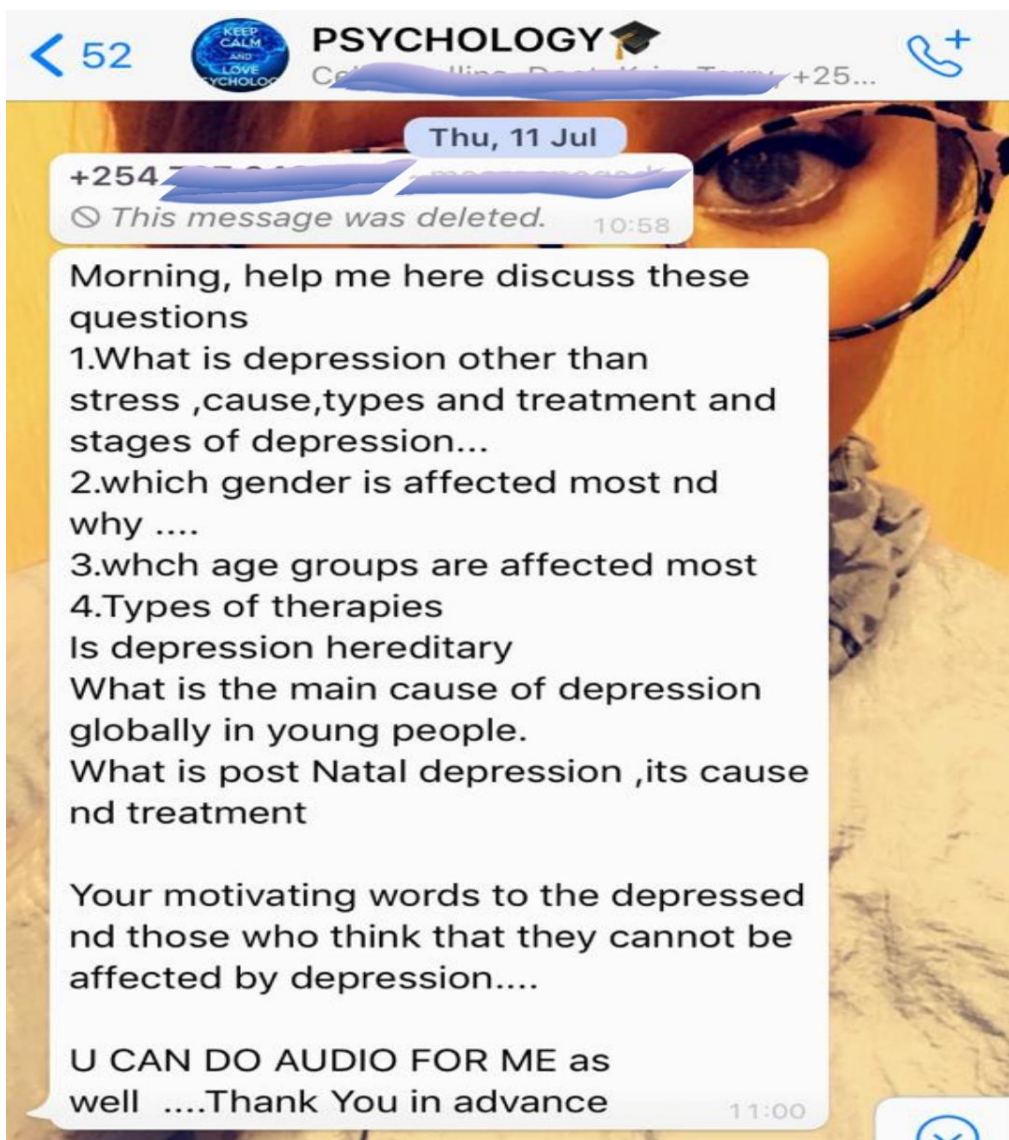
For purposes of privacy the names of the teachers have been blocked.



Participant 16/2019 revealed:

*I joined the class online groups (psychology) for academic purposes, for the purpose of discussions as well as to ask questions related to the units am taking and just to feel connected to my classmates for academics, support in school and life issues and for fun purposes; we joke a lot in that group!*

**Image 4.4: Psychology Class Online Group**



< 52



PSYCHOLOGY



- e. Research and Development
- f. Development of a Master Sampling Frame
- g. Development of Geo-Spatial Data-base

3. The Government of Kenya has three arms. Name them and the titles of their heads (6 marks)?
  - a. The President (1 mark) – heads the Executive (1 mark).
  - b. The Chief Justice (1 mark) - heads the Judiciary (1 mark).
  - c. The Speaker (1 mark) - heads the Legislature/Parliament (1 mark).
4. Kenya adopted two levels of Government after the promulgation of the New Constitution in 2010. Name them (2 Marks)  
National (1 mark) and County Governments (1 mark).
5. Kenya's development programme from 2008 to 2030 was launched in 2008. Which planning document is this? (2 Marks)  
Kenya Vision 2030 (2 Marks)
6. Kizazi area received rain for six days as follows: 300mm, 360mm, 180mm, 120mm, 420mm and 360mm. Find the mean. (2 Marks)  
Answer: 290mm (2 Marks) (290 =1 mark, mm=1 mark)

20:10

+254 732 1105

+254 732 062671

Photo

Mwenye alituma hii.... Atusaidie na page

2 🙏🙏

21:53

+254 732 1105

+254 732 062671

Mwenye alituma hii.... Atusaidie na page 2 🙏

🙏

Aki sijapata page 2...

21:57

Ni hyo tu

21:57

+254 732 1105

Na content supervisors pprs zao ziko,  
ama hawajaitwa

21:57



+254 [redacted] [redacted]

+254 [redacted]

Na content supervisors pprs zao ziko, ama hawajaitwa

Instructions: Write your ID and Phone Number, County, Sub-County, Division, Location and Sublocation

Time: 1 Hour: 20 Min

1. What is a population and housing census? (3 Marks)
2. Why does the Government conduct censuses? Give three reasons (6 Marks)
3. Who are the heads of the three arms of government (Title and name)? (6 marks)?
4. What are the levels of Government in Kenya (2 Marks)
5. What is the name of Kenya's long term development plan? (2 Marks)
6. Kizazi area received rain for six days as follows: 300mm, 360mm, 180mm, 120mm, 420mm and 360mm. Find the mode. (2 Marks)
7. Find the area of a circle whose diameter is 14cm (Take  $\pi = 22/7$ ) (3 Marks)
8. A retailer bought a mobile phone for KSh 6,440 and sold it at KSh 6,762. Calculate the percentage profit (3 Marks)
9. Nettie has only three children who were born triplets and are all girls. The first daughter was born on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2012. Nettie was 32 years old when she delivered. How old will she be in August 2023? (2 Marks)
10. Who is the Senator of this County .....? (1 Mark)
11. For the 2019 census to succeed, there is need for teamwork. How will you ensure that there is teamwork? (4 Marks)
12. How do you take care of a phone/Tablet? (6 Marks)

22:04

+254 [redacted]

+254 [redacted]

Enumerators hawana iyo ya one on one



22:04

Participant 17/2019 observed:

*I joined a family group of cousins to stay connected to them and to support each other in various aspects of life. They are my cousins so I feel very connected to them both online and offline.*

The need to stay connected to others remains a primary need among the youth. As the youth migrate to other physical locations for work, school, residence or marriage they still have a desire to connect to those they know from their previous engagements. These online groups afford them the ability to create continuity and community despite the boundaries created by physical spaces. This connection creates bonding that is vital for a sense of belonging, comfort as well as a safe place for them. It can be viewed as a re-connection of persons separated by geographical space.

Bonding social capital is a connection within a group or community characterized by high levels of similarity in demographic characteristics, attitudes and available information and resources (Claridge, 2017). This connection happens between people who typically have strong close relationships, like family, classmates, friends or neighbors; the case of participant 16/2019 and 17/2019. These are people who know each other (classmates and cousins) and interact frequently. The individuals in these groups tend to be interconnected; the relationship reinforces exclusive identities and promotes homogeneity. This association is developed for support and connection. The youth join online groups for bonding social capital; they derive this through academic support, such as participant 16/2019 in the psychology group. It helps them to stay connected to people they already know offline such as their cousins, classmates or former high schoolmates like participant 17/2019. These online communities provide entertainment, a sense of belonging, strong connections and support in life, such as participant 15/2019 in the high school online group.

In an interview with Social Media Experts 1 she said with regards to the reasons that influence the youth to join an online group:

*It's for gratification; the youth are looking to satisfy a desire and the desire is derived from social expectation they are going through with the emergence of the social media, where you can put yourself online to sort of create your own identity, personality and connection to other people/youth. Its social ascription for imaging and identity creation*

Social Media Expert 2 in an interview he argued:

*It's for user gratification, it's for the benefits that they get from being in these online groups, such as information, connection, entertainment etc. they will therefore seek out specific online groups that meet their specific need. Also at these stage in their life they tend to need the approval of their peers, it enables them to acculturate outside of their families to the broader tribe, as they learn to rely on those outside of their family setup.*

These online groups cannot be trivialized; they are powerful platforms that have the ability to meet the needs of the youth; the need to connect and re-connect; the need for support as well as access to information, and the creation of a sense of belonging. It is known that when the youth lack avenues to express themselves the effects are always negative; they either engage in violence, rebellion or even crime (Education Development Center, 2009). Studies also show that the youth are not quick to seek for advice from their parents or other adults in the society but they will prefer to access the internet in its various forms as a source of advice, support and even companionship, because many of the traditional barriers to seeking help and inclusion are reduced in online settings (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). The internet is a key source of

support for young people, who are likely first to seek help on an online site rather than talk to a counsellor, peer or parent. Anything a young person would be embarrassed or ashamed to ask their peers or parent about- such as sexuality,relationships or mental health- they are likely to ask peers on the internet. Thus the growing number of online dating sites and online dating, online support groups as well as ‘asks me anything’ chat boxes where the youth go to interact with their peers.

#### **4.4.2 What encourages you to be active, dormant or exit an online group you are in?**

The response to this question was as follows:

Participant 18/2019 in the focus group discussion said:

*The topic being discussed in the group; if the topic is interesting, hot, or it's a topic that I am interested or knowledgeable about then I will be active in the group, if not I will be dormant or even exit the group.*

Participant 19/2019 argued:

*If I am familiar with the group members I tend to be very active in that group, if I don't know them I will mostly be dormant and if I was recruited without my consent I usually exit the group.*

Participant 20/2019 observed:

*If people react positively to my views or comments then I tend to be active in that group, but if I am ignored when I make a contribution/s I will remain dormant and if I am attacked or ridiculed I exit the group.*

Social Media Experts 3 interviewed argued:

*It's the vibe that's there; this is how the youth relate to the topics being discussed on these online groups. If the vibe is interesting and relatable; like topics that deal with sex, relationships, politics, sports, fashion, academics, celebrities, gossip; then they will be active in those groups because it relates to their day to day life. Also if the people are open in the group and are discussing things freely, then it encourages them to be active as well.*

Social Media Experts 4 he revealed:

*When the group is communicating to them they will be active, but if it's not, they will be inactive; and even exit it because they are not getting their values met/ addressed. When their expectations and desires are not satisfied within a given period of time they exit. Conflict is another aspect that makes them be inactive or exit a group, if they are not getting along with their peers in their interactions they would exit. They can exit or be dormant to save face, if their ideas and opinions are not valued, or if they are ridiculed.*

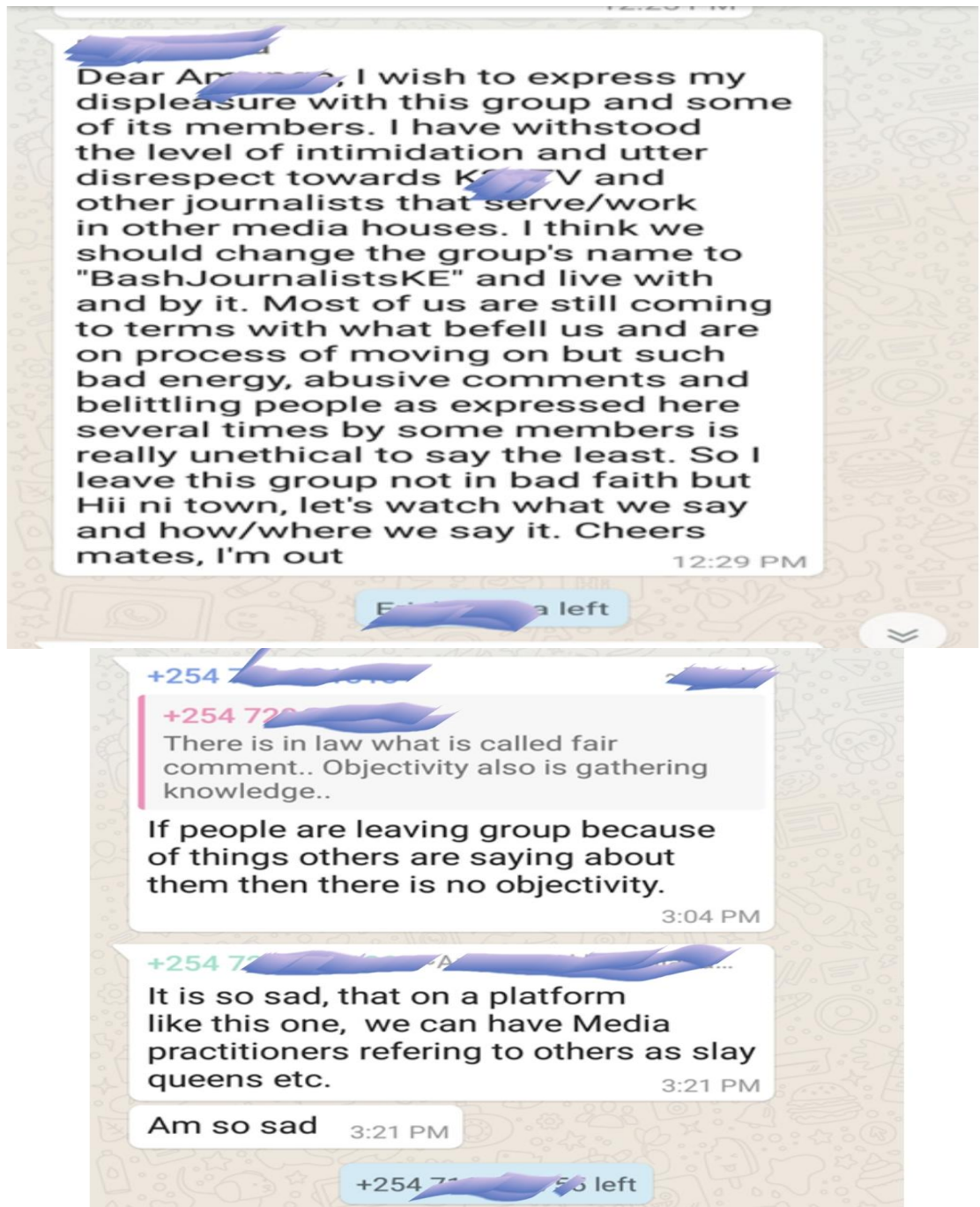
In an interview with Social Media Expert 5, he argued:

*When the purpose of the group is accomplished, for example, the fundraising is over; the members will naturally be inactive or even exit. Flame wars is also a major issue; when you give your opinion and people don't like it and it turns into a war that escalates and eventually the individual leaves to either save face or out of anger, or they just become an inactive member of the group. Also when people post content that is contrary to the groups objectives it irritates others and they exit or become inactive. If they were recruited out of*

*their choice and they don't feel like they belong there they may leave or just stay and be inactive in the group.*

Below are screenshots from a media online group that one of the participants 21/2019 is a member of. Members began to exit the group because of personal attacks on them. It was interesting to note that some other group members did not come to their defense but rather justified the situation by referring to other situations or diverting the subject by introducing other matters to the group.

Image 4.5: Media Practitioners Online Group



something. Life is bigger than just  
throwing words for their sake 2:56 PM

+254 [redacted]  
+254 [redacted]  
What E [redacted] has said is true and I  
feel him. Let's be ethical, accommodative,  
respectful and sober minded. Who has ...

This is the reason we call for  
objectivity. I think sometimes we get  
lost in our own worlds and forget who  
is around us. 2:57 PM

[redacted]  
[redacted]  
Young man, be careful with what you  
say. You have an ego over the roof that  
will make you big for a while but wont la...

Wacha vitisho hata Ruto amesema  
mambo mengi ya kishetani na bado  
Kalenjins wako na yeye 2:57 PM

+254 [redacted]  
+254 [redacted]  
This is the reason we call for objectivity.  
I think sometimes we get lost in our own

+2 [redacted]

Imari sacco

Kindly be notified that the much awaited Devidend Advance is set to begin tomorrow Wednesday 6-11-2019 in all branches

Kindly notify interested members

4:42 PM

+2 [redacted]

~ [redacted]

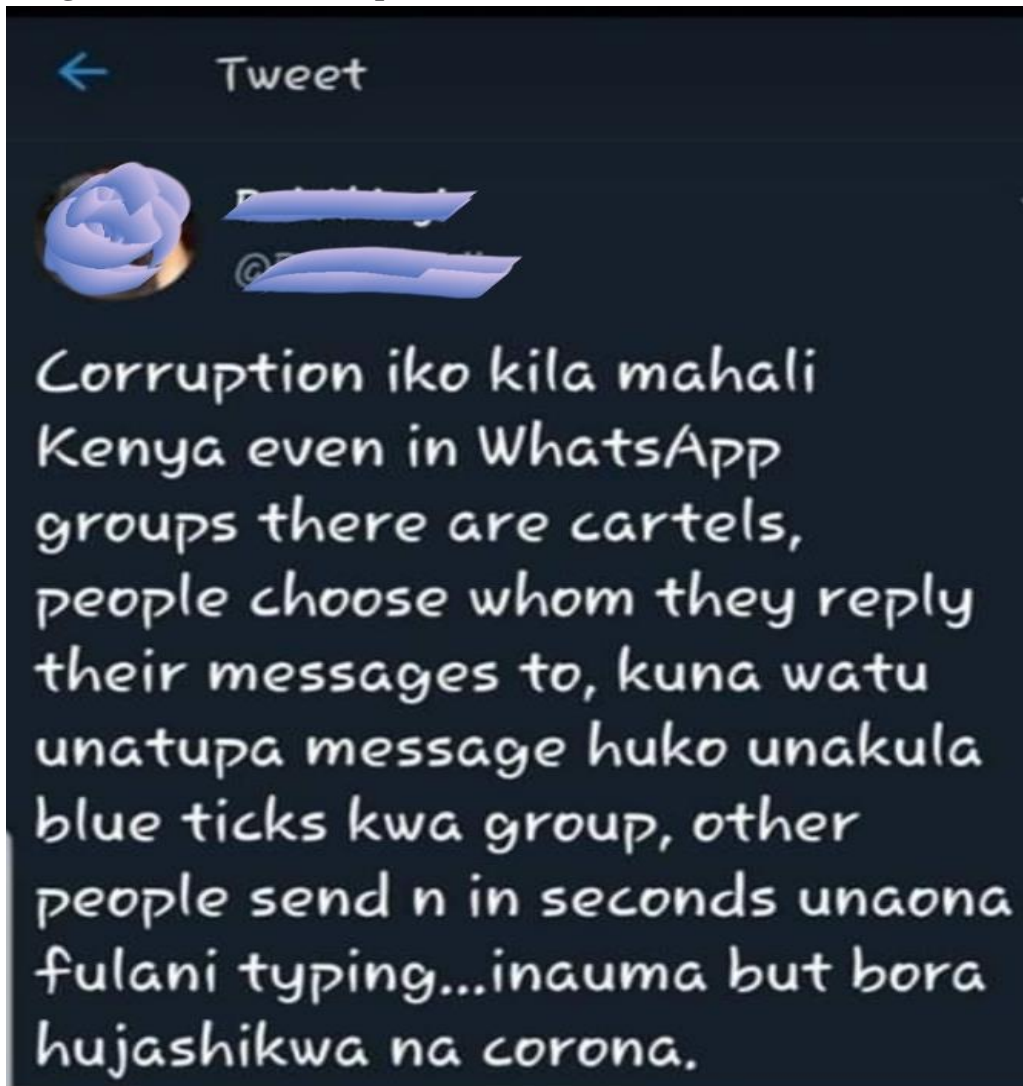
I can only leave the group when an individual attacks me unnecessarily. I feel for the colleagues who have left the group but that was not the best thing for them. They should have defended themselves. I don't fear social media attacks . I only leave groups when fools are attacking me . For their case there was no need of exiting because none was attacked directly .

4:43 PM

Group participation and activeness is not automatic among the youth it is a product of personal interest and group dynamics. The youth tend to be active in groups that address their specific needs, which are informed by the topics of discussion or the purpose for the formation of the group. Likewise, a sense of belonging and acceptance in the group creates a safe haven for one to be active. If the youth feel welcome in the group, they tend to be active, if they feel connected to the group members through common interests, such as all are supporters of a political party, a football team, media practitioners, classmates or first time mothers then they can be free in the group. Even though the interests may be common - like in the above case of media practitioners and media interested individuals - they still want to feel accepted in the group, appreciated and not attacked-if they participate in the group interactions, it helps if members appreciate their contribution and not trivialize, ignore, ridicule or attack them, like what happened in the group resulting in some members exiting.

For example in the Tweet shown below, this particular online group member complains that the online group is operating as a cartel; that when 'some people' say something people respond very well and comment but when others say something in the same online group they are 'blue ticked' (ignored) as though to suggest they don't matter or belong to the group/ 'cartel'. The respondent continues to say that this kind of treatment hurts a lot, it makes one feel that they don't belong to a group that they are part of. The respondent parallels this to the corruption in Kenya where some people seem to get everything and others get nothing and worse still are ignored as though they are not citizens of the same country with equal rights. The only consolation the member has is that he or she is corona free; to suggest that being healthy and especially Covid-19 free is of more importance and of greater consolation than the rejection a member can face on the online group.

**Image 4.6: Tweet from Respondent**



The discourse in the media group and Tweet reveals that being an active participant in an online group is not as a result of one's personality, but rather the personality of the group. If the group is individualistic in nature, where certain persons promote their agenda - for example Imar Sacco being promoted in a media group – the members may left or be inactive.

Similarly, if the group propagates values contrary to the values of the group, or some members are celebrated more than others, while certain members are discriminated against, then the members in that particular group will tend be inactive, disillusioned,

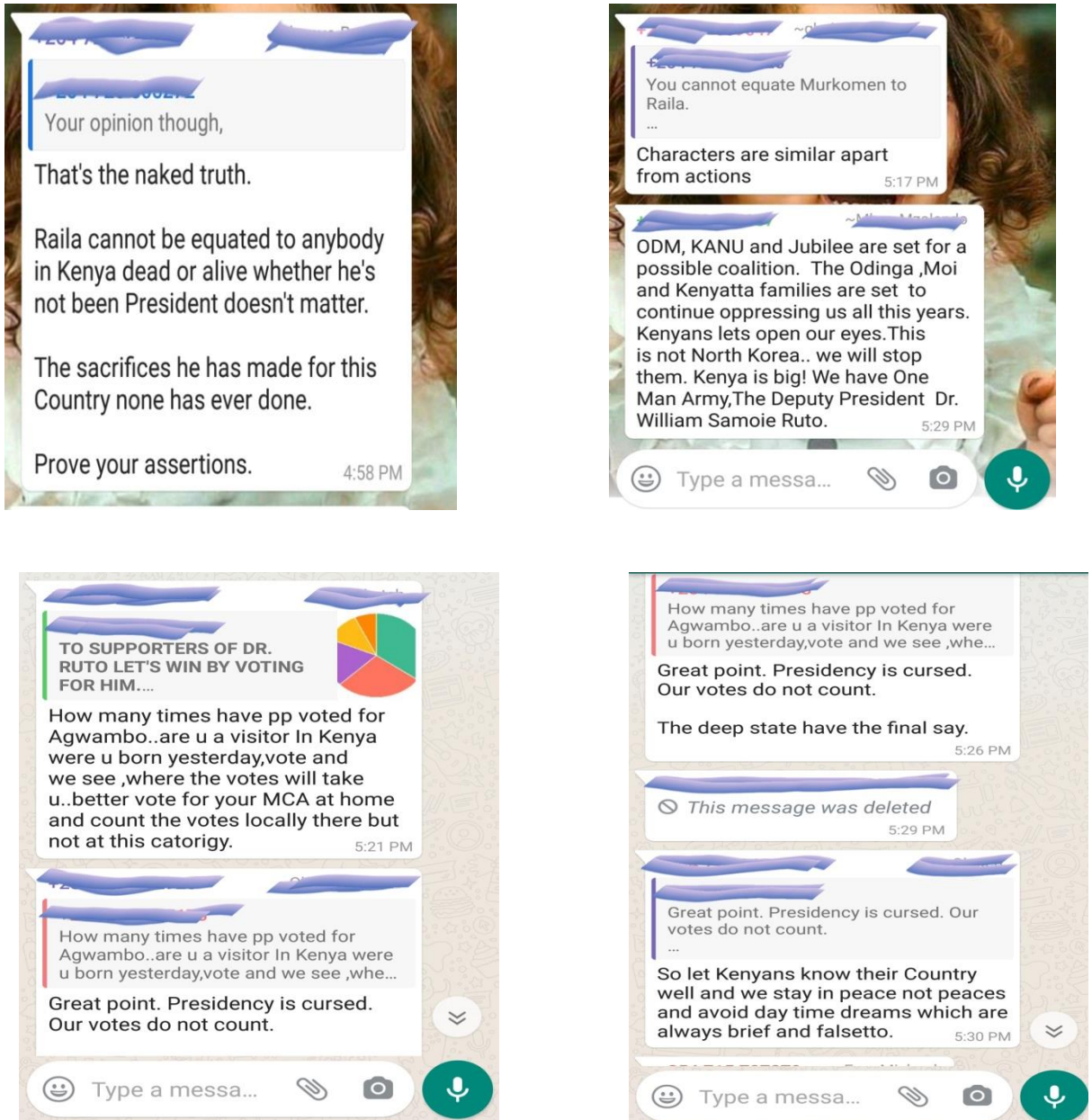
hurt or even left the group. When the group embodies collectivism-where they focus on the group goals, they channel their energy on what is best for the group as a whole-then the members participate more and give themselves more to the furtherance of the group. Maintaining this balance is not an easy thing, it requires the leadership of the group to steer the members to remain focused on collectivism and discourage individualism; expressed through bullying, shaming, ridiculing or name calling (like in the case of the media group, where some members refer to others as slay queens). Groups that focus on this will always tilt towards being active and encourage the members to feel safe and wanted. It therefore follows that the members of an online group will be active to the extent that the group focuses on collective gain. When the group pursues, tolerates or promotes individuals or individualistic agendas, the group will tilt towards being dormant, a cartel of sorts or extinct. Maintaining this balance is always a challenge since group members come in with their own agenda, personality, status and titles.

#### **4.4.4 Topics Discussed in the Online Groups**

The participants' response on the subject of topics discussed in the online groups ranged from: politics, trending topics in the country, celebrities, sports, fashion, academics, relationships, betting, religion, nursing tips, and photography. The youth extensively engage in online interaction for information, entertainment, connection and academics. They will congregate around topics that surround their lives and immediate environment. They also navigate towards topics that are designed to shape who they are or want to become. For example, they will engage in politics and trending national issues and address themes such as tribal alignments, political figures, issues of corruption and national development (see images of discussion

below). These themes are addressed with such passion because they touch on their core belief, strongly held opinions and alignments.

#### Image 4.7: Discussions in a Political Online Group



Some will engage in topics such as nursing tips, religion, academics and relationships: and address themes such as breastfeeding, weaning such as participant 12/2019.

**Image 4.8: From a Nursing Mothers' Online Group**



In matters religion they would talk about doctrinal issues and beliefs,

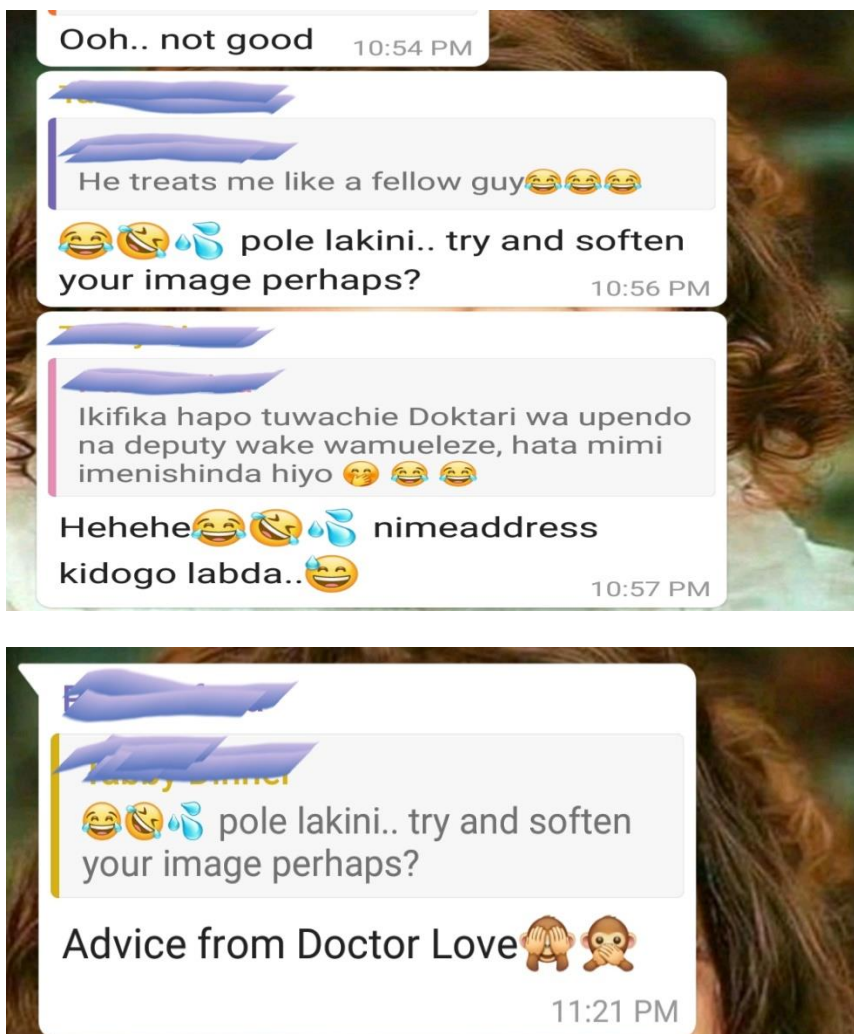
**Image 4.9: Discussion in Religious Online Group**



The themes addressed in academic groups address issues to deal with examination and topics that maybe hard to understand as displayed by participant 15/2019 in the psychology group.

Participants in social groups which constitute friends mostly talk about issues that surround their social life. It's a forum where they advise each other and help each other deal with the realities and challenges of their social life, as well as just have fun together.

**Image 4.10: Discussion from a Social Online Group**



In an interview with Social Media Experts 6 she explained:

*Some of the topics on these online groups help to distract the youth from other aspects like academics and the realities of life which are difficult to deal with. It's*

*something that is engaging and in it they can find a forum where they can express themselves, talk about something interesting or sensitive and vent their emotions.*

This resonates with a study by Waithaka's (2013) study on internet use amongst university students in Kenya which showed that the students used the internet for various purposes, including to study, teach and do research; to communicate; and for social interaction. The youth will naturally be attracted to topics that embody who they are, what they want to become and what they are interested in.

The youth also like these groups because they give them an opportunity to broach subjects that are otherwise not discussed on normal environment or with the people connected to them such as their parents but yet these are subjects that need to be addressed, understood and different perspectives examined. Subjects such as sexuality, sexual orientations, physical and emotional abuse, rape, mental health, self-esteem issues, addictions, suicide or boy child challenges find an avenue for open discussions in these online groups. The discussions tend to be open; people are given a chance to share their perspectives and experiences. As seen in the images below from an online group discussion on issues of the boy child and sexual consent.

*Image 4.11: Discussion on Boy Child and Sexual Consent*



Social Media Expert 6 also observed that:

*In these social media platforms members are known to raise hot subjects for discussions and mostly these subjects elicit such juicy discussions and openness that members are able to detach themselves from the stigma even as they express themselves and share their experiences or the experiences of significant others.*

#### **4.4.5 Influence to Join Multiple Online Groups**

The response from the question, ‘what influences you to join multiple online groups’, were as follows

Participants 21/2019 of the focus group discussion said:

*To be updated, to gather different ideas, every platform or group has its own advantage, so I join the groups for the advantage that I get. Sometimes I join a group for a particular reason and when that purpose is over I exit the group for example my friend’s surprise birthday party group.*

Participant 22/2019 argued:

*Diversity, for information, entertainment, as well as my current needs, am currently in a make-up artists group because currently I need information on that. I once joined a group for hiking because it was my need then, to go hiking!*

In an interview with Social Media Expert 7 he explained:

*“It’s about them experimenting what suits them, they shift and create more groups, what works for them they stick to it, if it doesn’t they leave. The virtual space affords them the opportunity to test different groups and even create new ones of their choice that serve particular purposes.”*

The youth tend to be in multiple online groups because it meets their various needs, something that one group alone cannot accomplish. They therefore enroll as group members in places where their various needs are addressed or where they find the kind of support, connection or camaraderie with like-minded people. They tend to ‘go’ to those particular groups to meet a need or meet a particular group of people, and this helps in their development and well-being and a feeling of wholeness and satisfaction. For example, a first time mothers group supports their need for information, while a sports group addresses their need for entertainment. A study by Sonderlund, Morton and Ryan (2017), found a positive relationship between multiple group membership and well-being for individuals with high social identity complexity. The study found that multiple group memberships indirectly contributed to well-being via perceived identity expression and social support, as well as identity compatibility and perceived social inclusion.

From the research findings of this study, majority of the respondents (54.4%) are members of one to three online groups, while (27.3%) are members of between four and seven online groups. (10.7%) of the respondents are member of between eight to eleven online groups, while (4.7%) are members of between twelve to fifteen online groups. (2.9%) of the respondents are members of more than fifteen online groups.

This supports the fact that the youth find it necessary to be in multiple groups because they are able to narrow down their interests to specific groups. Specific groups speak to their specific interests/needs; for example a class group is for assignments, photography group for hobby, family groups for belonging and much more. No one group can fulfill all their needs, because their needs are segmented and thus the need to be in multiple groups. It is also hard to sustain a particular group beyond the life of the group for example a group formed to fund raise for a friend or plan for a wedding. Once the fundraising or wedding is over the group goes dormant or it dies a natural death, because its purpose is over; unless the group members re-invent the group and give it a new purpose and even a new name that is binding enough to sustain its life.

The below image shows a baby shower group that was dissolved and members removed or left the group after the baby was born.

**Image 4.12: Baby Shower Online Group**



Members are encouraged to leave the group and close it because its purpose is accomplished (the awaited baby was born). According to social media expert 5; when the purpose of the group is accomplished the group becomes extinct and members leave unless the members re-invent the group to serve another purpose.

Image of members removed from the baby shower group after the purpose of the group is accomplished (the baby was finally born)

**Image 4.13: Removal from Online Group on Purpose**



The table 4.13 shows how many online groups the youth studied belong to.

**Table 4.13: Online Group Membership**

| <b>Number of groups</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1-3                     | 209              | 54.4           |
| 4-7                     | 105              | 27.3           |
| 8-11                    | 41               | 10.7           |
| 12-15                   | 18               | 4.7            |
| Above 15                | 11               | 2.9            |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>384</b>       | <b>100.0</b>   |

#### **4.5 Online Group Membership and Virtual Identity of the Youth**

The analysis of this objective sort to examine whether the youth - who are members of online groups -develop a unique identity online, referred to as the virtual identity. Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus's, (2008) three dimensional identity model which includes: Commitment, In-depth exploration and Reconsideration of commitment was used in analyzing data for this objective. The researcher examined the respondents' commitment to a particular self-presentation online. Commitment here refers to enacting enduring choices with regard to the social domain (the online group/s) and the self-confidence and gratification respondents' derive from these choices. This was achieved by examining how the online group has influenced the way they present themselves online as opposed to offline. The researcher also examined the respondents' in-depth exploration which represents the extent to which they think actively about the commitment to the self they present online. How they seek for additional information with regards to their commitment as well as how they talk

about their commitment to the self they present online. This was achieved by asking the question, ‘how do you want others to perceive you online’? The researcher also examined the respondents’ reconsideration of commitment which refers to the comparison of present commitments to a self-presentation with possible alternatives because the current commitments are no longer satisfactory. Reconsideration of commitment combines loosening existing commitments with broad exploration of new possibilities. This was done by examining how other peoples’ presentation online affected their self-presentation online. This was analyzed to find out whether existing commitments to a self-presentation online were secured during a process of reconsideration. Or if during the reconsideration process, one’s present commitments are deemed to be inadequate and are discarded in favor of new commitments. The findings based on the Crocetti, et al (2008) three dimensional identity model are discussed below as follows:

#### **4.5.1 Social Media Shaping Behaviour Online**

The participants’ response to the question, ‘how has the online group influenced the way you present yourself online as opposed to offline’ was as follows

Participant 23/2019 observed:

*I am very cautious online, I am very careful not to say things that can be controversial or cause me a lot of backlash. I tend to play safe online than offline. I show my best behaviour online, like I talk of clean ups, the work I do with the children’s home, academic related stuff, as well as the service I do at my local church.*

Participant 24/2019 argued:

*Because many people tend to bash, troll and criticize others online, I do the same too albeit on my anonymous page. I troll a lot in the online groups that am a part of. It has just become a behaviour that I have developed online. I get to say what I want with no chills! I definitely don't talk like that offline*

Participant 25/2019 said:

*I am just a different person online as opposed to offline; online my behaviour is different to the extent of being controversial. I guess it's because of the pressure that exists in the online space. There can be a lot of bullying as well as competition, making it hard to just be normal online; you need to put up an image that is A-game online.*

Participant 26/2019 said:

*I use a lot of filters in my online pictures; the jewelry, hat, the complexion and makeup on my online profile picture is all filters! It makes me look perfect, that is definitely not how I look like in real life or offline, but I like posting those perfect pictures online, because the filters are available and I use them to look perfect! I receive a lot of good comments and likes with those pictures and it boosts my self-esteem. This makes me use more filters while posting my pictures.*

**Image 4.14: Photo with Filters**

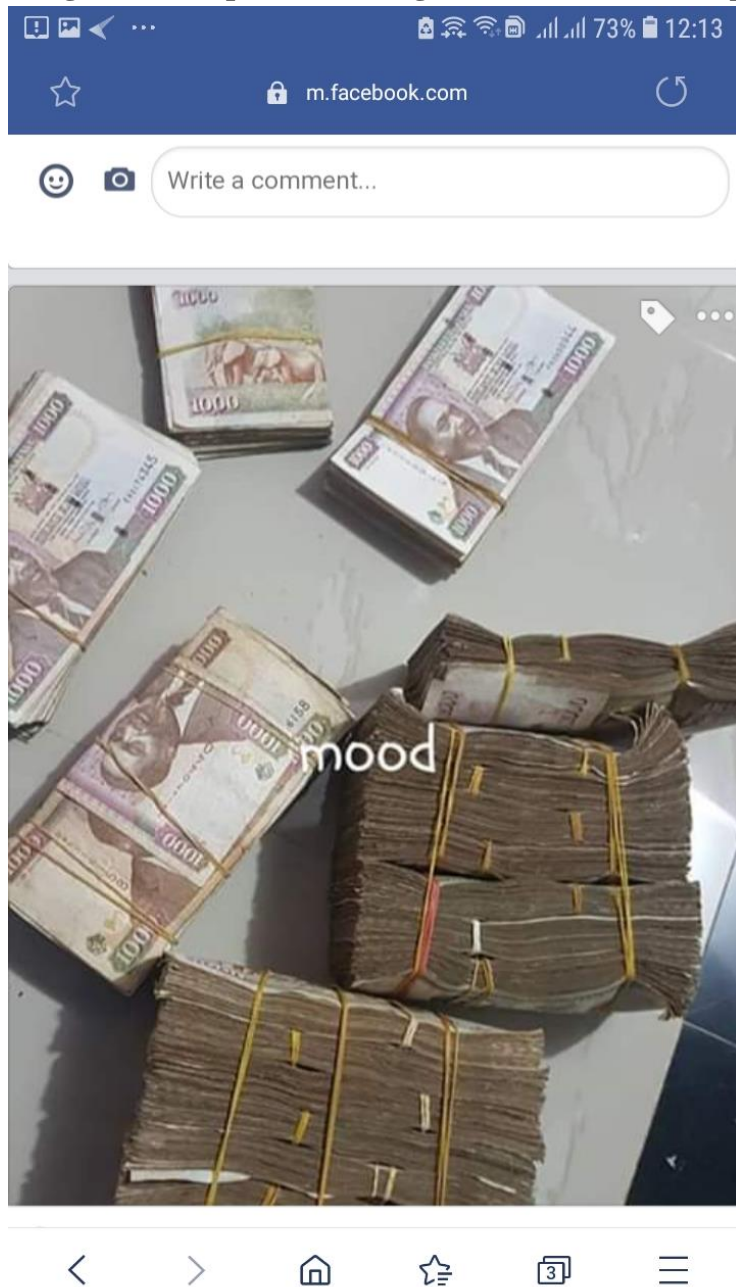


*Photo provided by responded. Blurred for privacy*

Participant 27/2019 reported:

*For a long time I have posted pictures of a flashy lifestyle like a lot of money and luxurious cars, because I want to be associated with the identity of wealth and fame even though I am not there yet in real life. Offline am just broke!*

**Image 4.15: Respondents Images on the Online Group**



In an interview with Social Media Expert 7 he argued that:

*The information shared on social media may be persuasive and as a result it may alter the behaviour of the person. It gives them a platform to exercise behaviour; it puts pressure on them that makes certain behaviours to show, and that behaviour becomes what they are identified with, it ultimately becomes their identity. That is why we have names such as slay queens or online influencer. These people have developed a certain identity online that they are known for.*

The above findings reveal that the youth make choices of how they want to be known online. They are seen to be committed to a particular self-presentation online that can be totally different from who they are offline. They practice these choices of self-presentation and derive gratification as a result. A good example is participant 23/2019 who enacts the choice of being cautious online. The participants reveals that she is careful of the things she says online and engages in playing safe online as well as showing her best side through pro-social behaviours such as cleaning, volunteering at the children's home and showing the service she gives at her local church. Participant 24/2019 has made a choice to be anonymous and as a result he practices trolling. The participant is gratified when he says what he wants to say online, what he refers to as 'no chills'. Participant 25/2019 practices being controversial and putting up an A-game while participant 26/2019 chooses to use filters while posting her pictures online. This participant feels confident when she receives many likes and positive comments, this reinforces her choice to use more and more filters online. Participant 27/2019 enacts a flashy lifestyle and feels confident when he is identified with wealth and fame. These responses concur with the fact that the youth are committed to a particular virtual identity through the choices they make and the

gratification they gain from those choices. At this stage the participants are seen to be making a relatively firm choice about a virtual identity and engaging in significant activities geared towards the implementation of that choice.

#### **4.5.2 Perception Online**

In this next step, the researcher examined the respondents' in-depth exploration by assessing how they actively think about their commitment to the self they present online, and how they seek additional information with regards to their commitment to a virtual identity. As well as how they talk about their commitment to this virtual identity. This analysis was done by examining the question, 'how do you want others to perceive you online?' Perception was employed to investigate how the senses are used to create the online world that the youth live in. Perception is very powerful, because it tricks the brain into believing, thus one's online presentation becomes a representation of who they are perceived by others to be (Prestidge, 2018).

Participant 28/2019 explained:

*I want to be perceived a certain way online, I want to be liked, admired and celebrated, but when people say things that are contrary or negative, or when they don't say anything at all, like liking my photos and commenting on them, it makes me feel less valuable, stressed and my self-esteem goes down, so I tend to take pictures that makes me popular, such as dressing hot and standing next to pools. In fact what I portray on my Instagram for example is absolutely opposite of my true self that I don't allow people who really know me offline or criticize my Instagram life to view my Instagram page, because it's so not a*

*true representation of me in the real world. I have even had arguments with and blocked people who criticize my Instagram life.*

**Image 4.16: Respondents Chat on Manipulating their Instagram**



Participant 29/2019 said:

*I want to be perceived as affluent. I am totally different online than I am in real life. In real life I live at kwa Kairo but I cannot post pictures of that place, I always post pictures in nice neighbourhoods. I can never post pictures of where I live in real life. These flashy life postings receive a lot of likes and comments and that makes me feel good! That's how I want to be known online!*

Image 4.17: Respondent's Images on the Online Group



Participant 30/2019 reported:

*I always post pictures standing next to expensive cars like Range Rovers, and in nice places. So I always find these nice cars and nice places and take pictures next to them. My online friends believe I am doing well and my life is*

*all rosy, I like that identity, and the comments that come with it! But the truth of the matter is, 'kwa ground vitu ni different!'*

**Image 4.18: Respondent's Images on the Online Group**



In an interview with Social Media Expert 7 he explained that:

*It's all about accommodation: the youth want to fit within the social media realities; they want to be admired, to engage with people who have the same values and belief systems. So they will accommodate what is there, by copying or enhancing; and therefore their identity changes over time, or*

*rather their identity online changes from their identity offline. Meaning that overtime they develop an online identity or a virtual identity.*

In an interview with Social Media Expert 8 she argued that:

*There are lots of apps that help the youth achieve these kinds of manipulation of identity, like face apps. They can edit their photos; they can edit out people they don't want. A man can put the photo of a woman; they can edit locations and even write that they are at a particular location when they are not. They also post specific places they have visited like hotels, beaches and suites but not the other places that make up their lives, like the estates they live in, or their home in the village. There are some who remain anonymous. There is also synonymity; where half of what is said is true while the other is not. Since Social media is anonymous and remote it gives them a lot of way and play to manipulate their identity.*

In an interview with Social Media Expert 3 she said:

*Online the youth present a character that is attractive for the public to see, but offline they go back to their own individuality or individual identity. The concept of virtual identity comes to play where they fit in online but when they go offline they embody their ethnic, cultural, values that add up to who they are. This is majorly because; online they are influenced by media, international pop culture, peers, celebrities and the like.*

In an interview with Social Media Expert 2 he said:

*Online they put their best moments carefully edited and crafted because of peer pressure, to gain followers, and have a voice. Some of them have so many*

*friends online but in real life they are lonely and confused. They are not sure of themselves offline, neither are they go-getters as they portray online they are actually laid back. But there are also some youth who are ok enough to present the same self-offline and online.*

Commitment and In-depth exploration are intertwined processes of identity development. Actively committed participants are seen to continue to intensively explore the domains of their choices in the commitment stage. For example, Participant 28/2019 says, 'I want to be perceived a certain way online'. It means that the participant actively thinks about the kind of way she wants to be perceived online. She is aware of the kind of identity she wants to develop online. The participant goes ahead to reveal how she wants to be perceived by using words such as: liked, celebrated and admired. The participant also actively thinks of the negative or contrary things that people may say or even if they don't say anything at all. The participant spends time thinking about her pictures being liked and given positive comments. This is gratifying to her because it boosts her self-esteem and makes her feel valuable. The participant therefore posts pictures that will make her popular and even argues and blocks people who criticize her online presentation. This means that she works hard at developing that virtual identity. It is an active process as opposed to being passive.

Participant 29/2019 actively thinks of affluence. The participant is aware of the virtual identity he wants to develop. In fact he says that he can never post pictures of kwa-Kairo which is where he lives in reality. This means that the participant blocks out anything that may negate the virtual identity he is developing online whether or not that thing is part of his offline identity. The participant looks out for high end neighbourhoods and presents those images as a representation of where he lives.

Meaning that he finds the materials that will help him ‘construct’ the virtual identity he wants. The participant thinks of getting many likes and positive comments online, this is what gives him gratification and affirms the virtual identity he has developed online. The participant also talks of how he wants to be known online and that is affluent. It means that he embraces this virtual identity that he has developed online. Participant 30/2019 thinks of expensive cars like Range Rover. She likes it when others believe that she is doing well. As a result she seeks out more nice cars and locations and takes pictures and posts them online. The participant talks about liking an identity of doing well even though ‘kwa ground vitu ni different’.

In-depth exploration can therefore be conceived as an adaptive identity process, because it implies that the participants deal with existing commitments in an active way. These participants work hard to maintain their commitment to a virtual identity, so that they can continue to receive more and more likes as well as positive comments. This is what gives the gratification and affirms their commitment to a virtual identity. In the event that they don’t receive as many likes or as many positive comments then they work on improving or fashioning that virtual identity more so that it can fetch the gratification that they are looking for online. Further examples below reveal the same:

Participant 31/2019 on the focus group discussion said:

*I want others to perceive me as smart, knowledgeable, exposed, a go-getter, and a leader. I also want to be perceived as successful, so I post highlights of the nice places I have visited physically.*

**Image 4.19: Images of Sites Visited by Respondent**



**Egerton Castle**  
New



**Urban by CityBlue**  
New



**Kigali Marriott  
Hotel**  
New



**Mövenpick Hotel  
& Residences  
Nairobi**  
New

[See all visited places](#)

Participant 32/2019 said:

*I want others to perceive me as an expert in photography. I love taking pictures and have started my own photography business, so I want to be perceived as a great photographer with much experience, breath taking shots and a happy clientele.*

**Image 4.20: Taking Pictures on a Suspended Bridge**



*Photo provided by respondent from their Online Group*

Participant 33/2019 reported:

*I want to be perceived as very successful, very happy and very friendly. I want to be seen as someone who is living their dream. So I post picture of things I like especially shoes with hash tags like #mynewestbae to give the impression that I own many of these kinds of expensive things. I also post videos on Instagram and go live on Facebook especially when am having fun like in parties or am hanging out at a nice place.*

**Image 4.21: Respondent's Images on the Online Group**



Participant 34/2019 said:

*I want to be perceived as a good example to others. I want others to perceive me as real and not fake. So I tend to put my real self-online.*

Participant 35/2019 said:

*I am more perfect online in terms of my pictures than I am offline. I present a more intelligent self-online than I am offline. Online I post intelligent quotes from famous people or books, but offline I never talk like that. I also present a more confident self-online than I am offline, so there is a very clear distinction of me online and me offline. My friends sometimes make fun of me but I don't care that's my online vibe!*

Participant 36/2019 in the focus group discussion explained:

*The pictures I post online are not a true representation of who I am offline there is a particular image of me that I prefer online. I care much about what people say about me online, so I try to look really great*

In an interview with Social Media Expert 8 she argued:

*The youth want to be perceived positively: they want to create an identity that is pleasing to people, they want to be admired. They want to be reassured; there is a lot of attention seeking online and they want their identity enhanced by the way people see and view them on these online platforms. To achieve this they go a long way including creating a self-online that is totally different than the self-offline.*

The youth thus put a lot of work with in-depth exploration of their self-online, because they are committed to the identity that they are developing there. Participant 31/2019 for example reveals that they want others to perceive them as: smart, successful, knowledgeable, and exposed, a go-getter and a leader. As a result the participant posts pictures of nice places they have visited physically so that they can reinforce that virtual identity.

Participant 32/2019 wants to be known as an expert in photography. As a result he advertise his photography business online, showing breath-taking shots as well as talking about his happy clientele.

Participant 33/2019 actively thinks about herself as being successful, very happy and friendly and living her dream. This is the virtual identity she is committed to and wants to be perceived as. The participant posts pictures of expensive shoes to give an impression that she owns very expensive things. She also posts videos of herself while having fun at parties or visiting nice places.

These responses corroborate with (Anderson & Jiang, 2018) who said that in online spaces, fashioning identity is very prevalent, because the youth want to impress. Social media or any media is connected with an audience, whether known or unknown, and the participants on these platforms are always aware that they are being 'watched' which makes them want to be seen in a particular way. They feel that they are responsible for how their audience see them. They engage actively in building that image that they want their audience to see, and if the image they have built is favorable then they spend time maintaining it or improving on it and talking about it so that they can continue to be celebrated by their audience. It is therefore a performance of sorts since the participants are always conscious of the fact that they

are being watched and ultimately someone will give feedback of what they have seen. Whether that feedback is loud or silent still matters to them. Negative consequences could also stem from in-depth exploration. For example, one can become overly involved in evaluating and contemplating their current commitments becoming unsure and sceptical about their choices such as participant 28/2019 who feels less valuable, stressed and experiences low self-esteem as a result of overly evaluating her self-presentation online.

#### **4.5.3 Other Peoples' Online Presentation Influence**

With the prevalence of social media, Stein (2019) argues that the practice of compare and despair has become excessive. The question is; are we judging ourselves too strictly against the filtered images of our “friends?” Stein says that:

We may consciously, or subconsciously, internalize a post about a peer's wedding as: Mary got married. Everyone is getting married. I am never going to meet anyone. What is wrong with me? I should try to go out and meet people. Let's go to the bar! (Stein, 2019)

The question, ‘how does other peoples' presentation online affect your self-presentation online?’ therefore sort to understand in what ways are perceived shortcomings influencing the youth to reconsider their commitment to their virtual identity. Reconsideration of commitment refers to the comparison of their virtual identity with possible alternatives because it is no longer satisfactory. It examined the loosening of existing commitments with broad exploration of new possibilities thus constructing and revising identity over time. The responses were analysed to find out whether existing commitments to a virtual identity were secured during a process of

reconsideration. Or if during the reconsideration process, one's present commitment to a virtual identity were deemed to be inadequate and were discarded in favour of new a new virtual identity.

Participant 37/2019 in the focus group discussion argued:

*When someone is where I want to be professionally, physically or relationally, I tend to mirror what they do. If their values agree with mine they influence me to alter my presentation. If they are my role model they alter my presentation online, but if not their opinions and behaviour online doesn't affect mine.*

Participant 38/2019

*Yes how other people present themselves online affects my presentation. There are many people I want to be like. I admire their looks, their many followers. How they dress or the things they post online. So I try to be like them even though it's not easy because you need to have a lot to get there; like have that stuff and that following they have. So it's kind of stressful to keep up online.*

Participant 39/2019 in the focus group discussion said:

*Yes it does because I have role models and I emulate the way they present themselves online. I try to fit in with how they present themselves online. I consider myself to be a very religious person therefore I follow people online who preach what I believe. Their messages inspire me and challenge me to be a better person. I also repost their messages as a way of encouraging others to follow these values that continue to change and shape me every day.*

**Image 4.22: Respondent's Images on the Online Group**



Participant 40/2019 in the focus group discussion argued:

*Yes both negative and positive; when I was on Instagram it shook my self-esteem a lot because I wanted to be like the people I saw online but I did not have the means to keep up with them, so I exited and took a break because I felt like I could go insane. The online world can really put you down when you don't have the proper guideline; it depends with the people you associate with online, if they have a positive vibe that's great, but if they are all about show off, you can suffer trying to keep up with them.*

In an interview with Social Media Expert1 she argued:

*The youth are subject to opinion, they are easily influenced. Most youth feel the pressure of being like others or the many influencers out there like Akothee, Vera Sidika or Diamond who have a large following and they influence the behavior of the youth. Yes there are some who are sure of*

*themselves and are confident but most youth are swayed by other people online.*

In an interview with Social Media Expert 4 he said:

*The youth have their own perceptions, they are very critical of what others present online, so they only take/ borrow what relates to them and what they disagree with or it doesn't add value to them they reject by creating their own alternative views and perceptions about the issue or context being presented.*

In an interview with Social Media Expert 1 she argued:

*They do a lot especially presentations by celebrities and their mentors. People like Diamond, Akothee, and the like have a lot of influence on the youth and when they post something online they shape the presentation of the youth as the youth mimic what they say or do online. The language and image of these influencers empowers the youth to present themselves a certain way online. It was out of such presentations online that we saw the rise of sponsors, socialites and slay queens and a number of youth doing bizarre things online like posing half naked to look like these celebrities and acquire the status and following that they have. It's an issue of identity crisis online.*

Reconsideration of commitment encompasses the investigation of possible new commitments. It focuses on one's attempt to change their current commitment because they are no longer satisfied with their choices. It starts with a participant's evaluation of their present commitment. The youth are influenced a lot by others online; they constantly reconsider their self-presentation online based on what others are presenting there. The people who contribute to this reconsideration process

include celebrities, social media influencers or their peers who set the agenda and control the narrative on these online groups. As a result the youth find themselves aping their behaviour, adopting their actions and endorsing their culture. Before long they assimilate to their way of life and feel very confident being that way and as a result develop that as their virtual identity. This stage captures the iterative process of constructing and revising one's virtual identity. A good example is participant 37/2019 who says that he mirrors what other people do online meaning that he engages in the process of comparison with possible alternatives in his case it is people who seem to have some level of success professionally, physically or relationally. He says that if their values agree with his then he mirrors them and if they don't then he doesn't care for them. This means that in the process of reconsideration the participant's existing commitments remain secure. Participant 38/2019 says that she looks at peoples' looks, dressing, the things they have posted and the following they have. This is what influences how she then presents herself online. It means that the participant compares her commitment with possible alternatives, because she feels that her current commitments are no longer satisfactory. The participant says 'I try to be like them' meaning that she deems her own presentation to be inadequate and therefore it is discarded in the process of reconsideration. This is also seen in participant 39/2019 whose possible alternatives are role models. The participant considers himself to be very religious and therefore in the process of reconsideration of commitment with the role models his own commitment to a religious virtual identity is secure. Participant 40/2019 says that when she compared herself with others on Instagram it shook her self-esteem. This means that in the process of reconsideration her commitment to her virtual identity was deemed inadequate. The participant says that she wants to be like the people she sees on Instagram. This means

that she discarded her own virtual identity, in favour of other alternatives. Because the participant was not able to match up with other peoples' virtual identity she exited the online space. This means that she felt that she was too inadequate to develop that identity online and could not settle for her previous commitment to a virtual identity. The participant had the option of suffering trying to keep up or just quitting the online space because she could not keep up she chose to exit the online space.

The process of reconsideration of one's online presentation is a constant challenge for the youth. Most of the youth will go out of their way to look like their peers, celebrities or social media influencers. Many of their YouTube channels, Instagram pages, and WhatsApp or Facebook groups mirror the discussions and mannerisms of these social influencers. This is in line with the Communication theory of identity (CTI) which builds from the interactionism tenet that suggests that identities are emergent and obtained when people enter into relations with others who have identities as well (Hope et al, 2019).

This Behavioural mimicry also includes verbal, goal, and emotional contagion and attitudinal convergence. The messages on these platforms are also designed to target the youth in areas of marketing with the idea to influence them to follow, or buy a product or alter behaviour, and before long they embody the identity crafted by the persuasive messages. One of the most persuasive message at the time of this study was 'my dress my choice' by Akothee, a social media influencer. This consequently became the message and style embodied by many youth online.

It is also important to appreciate the fact that the youth can likewise weigh what is going on online against their own values and standards during this process of reconsideration of commitment; if the messages online do not mirror their commitment, values and way of life then they reject them, but if they do they easily

embrace them, because to some extent they seek to advance and affirm the virtual identity they have developed as stated by participant 39/2019 who embraces values that agrees with his own and rejects those that are contrary. Meaning that in the process of reconsideration his commitments are secure. The participant believes that his identity has been shaped by these commitments and as a result he is convinced that the same values and conversations are powerful enough to change others online who come in contact with them, thus it informs his efforts to spread the news online. This is in line with the Communication theory of identity (CTI) which builds from the interactionism tenet that suggests that, identities have individual, social, and communal properties. They are both enduring and changing. Identities are affective, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation (Hope et al, 2019).

#### **4.7 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, research findings and analysis were established with the first section showing the descriptive features of the respondents' general information. Descriptive statistics were then applied to analyze the general information and the results presented in figures. The chapter also showed the output of each of the research images that were mixed with the direct discussions analyzed through the three-dimensional identity model. The next chapter presents a discussion of the findings, summary of the same and presentation of conclusion and study recommendations.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.0 Introduction**

The main objective of this study was to investigate online group interaction and the development of virtual identity among the youth in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study sought to fulfil the following objectives, (1) Establish the extent to which youth in Nairobi County, Kenya are part of online groups. (2) Assess the reasons that influence the youth to join online groups. (3) Determine the extent to which online group membership develops the virtual identity of youth in Nairobi County, Kenya. This chapter summarizes the study findings, makes conclusions and recommendations.

### **5.1 Summary**

This section is segmented based on the study objectives. This enabled a more straight forward understanding of each objective and the accompanying findings.

#### **5.1.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Youth**

The study examined the demographic characteristics of the youth; the gender composition of the youth online group members was almost evenly matched with females being (52.6%) and males (47.4%). The age composition was also examined where a majority of the respondents (50.5%) belonged to the 18-20 age brackets, while (39.3%) belong to the 21-23 age bracket and the remaining (10.2%) belong to the 20-26 age brackets. Regarding the respondents' level of education, the majority of them (54.7%) were undergraduates, (39.8%) were college students, (4.4%) had a secondary diploma, while (0.5%) represented both primary and postgraduate respondents. Findings on internet expenditure per month showed that (29.4%) of the respondents spend 0-500 shillings per month on internet, (39.5%) spend Ksh 501-

1000 shillings per month on internet, (24.5%) of them spend Ksh 1001-1500 shillings per month on internet, and (8.6%) spend Ksh 1501-2000 shillings per month on internet use, while the remaining (6%) spend above Ksh 2000 shillings per month on internet use.

### **5.1.2 Youth and Online Group Participation**

The first objective of this study investigated the extent to which the youth are part of online groups. The findings recorded that (54.4%) of the respondents belong to one to three online groups, while (27.3%) belong to four to seven online groups. These findings corroborate qualitative findings where participants affirmed membership to online groups as a connection factor. They credit these online groups for helping to build stronger friendships and exposing them to a more diverse world, but they express concern that these groups lead to drama and social pressure. According to Appel. et.al (2019) the future of social network interaction is group chatting, as opposed to one on one chats. Finnegan (2018) reported that applications that afforded users group interactions such as WhatsApp delivered a range of benefits, including breaking down the traditional hierarchies that can stunt effective communication within a team. These online applications provide methods of communication that are efficient as they enable members who are fragmented by physical boundaries to come together and interact.

### **5.1.3 Influence of Joining Online Groups**

The second objective of this study was to assess the reasons that influence the youth to join online groups. The participants affirmed that the need to connect with people they already know offline is paramount; the participants were interested in keeping in

touch with previous friends from high school, or staying connected with family members with whom they are geographically apart. According to Claridge (2017), bonding social capital is a connection within a group or community characterized by high levels of similarity in demographic characteristics, attitudes and available information and resources. This connection happens between people who typically have strong close relationships, like family, friends or neighbors. These are people who know each other and interact frequently, and thus use social networking platforms to maintain their connection. The participants also affirmed that they join these online groups so that they can connect with likeminded people; people who share their interests whether it's professional, recreational, social or religious. They join these groups so that they can learn more from them, experience a feeling of belonging, receive support and identify with a community of others who share the same experiences. According to Putnam (2001), bridging social capital functions to bring together disparate members of the community. Bridging social capital provides low socio-economic status individuals with the potential to access resources outside of their constrained environment. Bridging enables people in virtual communities to share information and receive support from others with whom they share interests or similarities.

#### **5.1.4 Online Group Membership and Virtual Identity of the Youth**

The third objective was to determine the extent to which online group membership develops the virtual identity of the youth. In the findings the participants affirmed that they present themselves in a particular way online because they consciously want to be perceived a certain way on the virtual space. They are aware that they are being watched and therefore it is very important to them that they feel appreciated,

celebrated and affirmed online. They therefore manipulate their identity online to receive more likes and appealing comments; once they construct the virtual identity through the process of commitment, in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitment. They commit to an online identity that gives them gratification and they spend their time online maintaining and improving on it for more and more gratification. If this need for gratification is not met, especially in the process of reconsideration of commitment, then they become dormant online or exit an online group.

This Virtual identity is a consequence of identity crises – which here refer to identity exploration - that arise as a result of a need to develop a self-online. The Virtual space, through affordances such as anonymity, synonymy and use of filters gives the youth ample opportunities for self-expression as opposed to real life spaces. The online groups provide some form of camaraderie to their members through bridging and bonding, though this trust is fragile and at times temporal because of the flame wars that go on these online groups. When their expectations are shattered it results into one being dormant, inactive or leaving the online group.

These findings therefore reveal that the youth are at a critical stage in life where identity plays a major role in their operations, and therefore they need to ‘frame’ ideal identities in order to be ‘accepted’ by their peers. These findings corroborate previous studies by Boyd (2008) and Dunne and Lawlor (2010) who attributed the use of social networking sites (SNSs) among the youth to create personal identity. Roux (2020) also agreed that the youth were motivated by the need for image, fashion and status in their social networking sites (SNSs) use. This could have both positive and negative impacts considering aspects such as sexting, cyber bullying, terrorism and even human trafficking. Positively, these identities could cultivate good relationships,

which can improve their performance in school and enhance mental health, awareness of the dangers of illicit drugs and sexually transmitted diseases.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The study made the following conclusions based on result findings. Firstly, the high percentage of youth belonging to multiple online groups is a clear indication of the importance that this category of people attaches to this medium. The appeal of online groups to the youth should be encouraged and probably harnessed for positive outcomes both socially and in academics; bearing in mind that the youth deal with tremendous pressure in the area of academics as well as the social challenges that surround their lives such as drugs, sex, unemployment, financial challenges, mental health, esteem issues and much more.

Secondly, the quest to enhance their virtual Identity motivated the youth to frame their presentations online. This can be attributed to the stage in their lives where they are transitioning into new responsibilities in life, implying that they are trying to find answers and affirmation in life. The fact that most youth would present an 'ideal' identity online shows that there is an identity crisis in this stage of life. Their perceived shortcomings influence them to create or manipulate their own presentation online. Equally, these youths seek acceptance among their online community members and thus switch their identities depending on which group they would feel comfortable belonging to. Among the features presented on these online groups is that: groups that stick to the agenda of the group and appreciate members equally without prioritizing others and trivializing or bullying others tend to thrive and have members participating more actively and feeling safe in these groups.

Lastly, the youth sought online group membership for user gratification, where they were inherently connected to the world outside the media system and bonded with persons whom they have established relationships with. They also engaged in bridging to connect with disparate members of the community, as well as to access resources outside of their constrained environment.

Conversely, further investigation should be conducted among the youth to determine the consequences of this continual interaction online and whether it results into better connections offline.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing summary, discussions, and conclusions the study makes the following recommendations.

#### **5.3.1 Recommendations based on the extent to which youth are on these online groups**

There is a high population of youth who are online. The average youth in Nairobi County has access to a smartphone as well as internet connectivity. These youth are also members of up to five online groups on various social media platforms. This study therefore recommends a continued effort to enable connectivity across the country to be able to bridge the digital divide as well as facilitate the use of internet connectivity as an enabler to growth and development of the youth across the country. Institutions of learning – especially higher institutions of learning - should also prioritize internet connectivity for all students in their strategic plans.

### **5.3.2 Recommendations based on reasons why youth join online**

The youth join online groups for bonding social capital as well as bridging social capital. The online community enables them to connect with those they know offline as well as those whom they share common goals, ambitions or challenges. This study therefore recommends the creation of awareness to the power of these online groups. These can be done through further studies that investigate the impact of online group membership to one's offline life to the extent of dealing with issues such as addictions, transitions of life in the areas of career, marriage, business etc and how the interactions and advisement received online empowers the members to deal with the vicissitudes of life. The study also recommends the use of online groups as an avenue for learning. Educators need to appreciate these online groups as a platform where learning can take place. Teachers should not shy off from joining these online groups and even teaching from these platforms, neither should they trivialize learning that happens there.

### **5.3.3 Recommendations on Group Membership Virtual Identity**

The youth form a virtual identity as a result of interacting on these online groups. The interactions that happen there plays a big role in the shaping of a unique identity online that one identifies with and is known for. This study therefore recommends a consideration on the value of one's interaction online in the enhancement of their offline lives. The identities developed online can go a long way in working for or against an online user whether one becomes a socialite or a successful entrepreneur can be achieved online. The youth should therefore be guided on the kind of identity they develop online.

#### **5.4 Chapter Summary**

In this final chapter, the summary was presented followed by conclusion based on the findings. It is from the conclusion that recommendations followed with specific focus on reasons why the youth join these online groups, how to enable connectivity that facilitates online interaction as an enabler for growth and development as well as leveraging on the virtual identity to enhance one's offline life. The study recommends further research on the area of online interaction, its infiltration of the traditional ways of life and the impact it has on our society as a whole.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: Letter of Introduction

Dear Respondent,

I am a postgraduate student undertaking a Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communication Studies at Kenyatta University.

I am conducting a Research for a PhD Thesis entitled: **ONLINE GROUP INTERACTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIRTUAL IDENTITY AMONG THE YOUTH IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA.**

You have been identified as a resourceful respondent for this study. This is an Academic Research and the findings will be used for academic purposes only. All the responses will be treated with confidentiality and the identities of the respondents will remain anonymous. I am requesting for your assistance in order to obtain the required data for this study. Your participation is highly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Deckillah Omukoba

PhD Student, Kenyatta University

## **APPENDIX II: Interview Guide Consent Form**

Dear Participant,

This is a research on online group interaction addressing identity development among the youth. I am inviting you to participate by giving answers to the questions below with the assistance of the researcher. Your participation is voluntary and you will not be penalized if you discontinue at any stage. Information given will be handled with confidentiality and will be used only for academic purposes. If you agree to participate in the research please sign below:

Participant signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely,

Deckillah Omukoba

PhD Student, Kenyatta University

## **APPENDIX III: Interview Guide for Social Media Experts**

### **Section A: Demographics of the Respondents**

*In the following questions tick [✓] the appropriate option*

#### **Section A**

1. Gender:      Male                    Female
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Occupation (Speciality) \_\_\_\_\_

### **SECTION B**

#### **2. Reasons that influence the youth to join online groups**

1. What can influence the youth to choose a specific social networking site?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What would influence the youth to join a specific online group?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What are some of the reasons that keep the youth active in these online groups?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Do the youth find it reasonable to be in multiple groups? Explain

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What are some of the reasons that influence the youth to exit an online group?

---

## **SECTION C**

### **3. How online membership develops the virtual identity of the youth**

1. How do these online groups shape the behaviour of the youth online?

---

2. Does belonging to online groups influence development of individual members' identity in any way? If YES, how? Or Explain.

---

3. Based on your experience, how do the youth manipulate their identity online?

---

4. In your own opinion, how do the youth want others to perceive them online?

---

5. In your own opinion, do the youth consider other peoples' presentation in online groups influential enough to alter their own self- presentation online?

---

#### **APPENDIX IV: Consent Form and FGD Demographics**

Dear Participant,

This is a research on online group interaction addressing virtual identity development among the youth. I am inviting you to participate by giving answers to the questions below with the assistance of the researcher. The information collected will be recorded in a voice recorder and note taking, however, the researcher promises to keep your personal views confidential. Therefore, you do not have to mention your name during the discussion. All information will be used purely for academic purposes. Your participation is voluntary and you will not be penalized if you discontinue at any stage. If you agree to participate in the research please sign below:

Participant signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely,

Deckillah Omukoba

PhD Student, Kenyatta University

## Demographic Questions

### Fill the following questions

1. Gender:  Male             Female
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. level of education  
 1<sup>st</sup> year    2<sup>nd</sup> year    3<sup>rd</sup> year    4<sup>th</sup> year    other: \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your area of study  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How long have you been a member in the online group  
 1 year    2years    3years    4years    5years and  
above

## **APPENDIX V: FGD Discussion Guide**

Research assistant will welcome the participants then introduce the members and the study. Participants to sign consent form and fill demographic questionnaire.

### **1. Reasons that influence youth to join online groups**

- I. What influences you to join online groups?
- II. What encourages you to be an active participant in the online groups you are in?
- III. What topics are discussed on these online groups?
- IV. What influences you to be in multiple online groups?

### **2. How online membership develops the virtual identity of youth**

- I. How has the online group influenced the way you present yourself online as opposed to offline?
- II. How do you want others to perceive you online?
- III. How does other peoples' presentation online affect your self-presentation online?

## **APPENDIX VI: Self-Administered Questionnaire Consent Form**

Dear Participant,

This is a research on online group interaction addressing identity development among the youth. I am inviting you to participate by giving answers to the questions below with the assistance of the researcher. Your participation is voluntary and you will not be penalized if you discontinue at any stage. Information given will be handled with confidentiality and will be used only for academic purposes. If you agree to participate in the research please sign below:

Participant signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely,

Deckillah Omukoba

PhD Student, Kenyatta University

## APPENDIX VII: Self-Administered Questionnaire

### Section A: Demographics of the Respondents

*In the following questions tick [] the appropriate option*

#### Section A

1. Gender:      Male                    Female
  
2. Age:    18-20    21-23    24-26
  
3. What is your highest level of education?  
  
       Primary Certificate    Secondary Certificate    Undergraduate     
      Masters    other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. How much money (Ksh) do you use on internet/bundles per month?  
  
       1-500    500-1000    1000-2000    2000-3000    above 3000

**Directions for questions 1: Please tick [] the correct response.**

1. Do you currently belong to a social network site(s)? []Yes []No

If you answered **Yes** [, please proceed to **SECTION B**.

## **SECTION B**

### **1. Extent to which the youth are part of online groups**

1. How many social media platforms have you subscribed to?

1-3  4-6  7-9  10-12  13-15  above 15

2. In how many social media platform/s are you a member of an online group?

1-3  4-6  7-9  10-12  13-15  above 15

3. How many participants are in your most active online group?

1-50  51-100  101-150  151-200  above 200

4. How many participants are in your most dormant online group?

1-50  51-100  101-150  151-200  above 200

5. How long have you been a member in the online group?

1 year  2years  3years  4years  5years   
above 5years

6. How many hours a day do you spend on social media?

below 1hr  1-3  4-6  7-9  10-12  13-15  above 15

7. Am an active member in the social media group/s

Strongly agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly   
Disagree

8. Am a dormant member in the social media group

Strongly agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly   
Disagree

## **APPENDIX VIII: Research Authorization**



**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,  
TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION**

Telephone: +254-20-2213471,  
2241349, 3310571, 2219420  
Fax: +254-20-318245, 318249  
Email: dg@nacosti.go.ke  
Website : www.nacosti.go.ke  
When replying please quote

NACOSTI, Upper Kabete  
Off Waiyaki Way  
P.O. Box 30623-00100  
NAIROBI-KENYA

Date: **26<sup>th</sup> June, 2019.**

Ref. No. **NACOSTI/P/19/23105/31154**

Deckillah Shitandi Omukoba  
Kenyatta University  
P.O. Box 43844-00100  
**NAIROBI.**

**RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION**

Following your application for authority to carry out research on *“Online group interaction and the development of virtual identity among the youth in Nairobi County Kenya.”* I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in **Nairobi County** for the period ending **24<sup>th</sup> June, 2020.**

You are advised to report to **the County Commissioner, and the County Director of Education, Nairobi County** before embarking on the research project.

Kindly note that, as an applicant who has been licensed under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 to conduct research in Kenya, you shall deposit **a copy** of the final research report to the Commission within **one year** of completion. The soft copy of the same should be submitted through the Online Research Information System.

**DR. ROY B. MUGIIRA, PhD.**  
**FOR: DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CEO**

Copy to:

The County Commissioner  
Nairobi County.

*JLB 9/7/2019*

The County Director of Education  
Nairobi County.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER  
NAIROBI COUNTY  
P. O. Box 30124-00100, NBI  
TEL: 341666

**APPENDIX IX: Research Permit**

**THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT: MISS, DECKILLAH SHITANDI OMKOKOBA of KENYATA UNIVERSITY, 0-30100 ELDORET, has been permitted to conduct Research in Nairobi County on the topic: ONLINE GROUP INTERACTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIRTUAL IDENTITY AMONG THE YOUTH IN NAIROBI COUNTY KENYA for the period ending: 24th June, 2020**

**Permit No: NACOSTI/P/19/23105/31154**  
**Date Of Issue: 26th June, 2019**  
**Fee Received: Ksh 2000**

**Applicant's Signature**

**BY: [Signature]**  
**Director General**  
**National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation**

