Research Article

Digital socialisation and self-identity: Psychosocial challenges faced by Generation Z adolescent girls while navigating social media platforms

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Abstract

Through the dual lenses of the psychosocial theory of development and the social learning theory, this multi-disciplinary study looks at the psycho-social effects of social media use on Generation-Z adolescent girls in Zimbabwe, colloquially identified as *'Ama2000'*. This study employed a qualitative approach through a narrative research design. Interviews were conducted with 11 adolescent girls and 4 key informants. Data that were analysed through narrative analysis established that many young girls suffer from body dysmorphic disorder as they felt that their bodies were contrary to the ideal figure depicted on social media platforms. Others also acquired a 'borrowed identity' to 'fit' into ideal social categories, leading to a low concept of self. Most female adolescents are addicted to social media platforms due to the fear of missing out (FOMO) on trending issues. Ultimately, this affects their worldview and how they interpret themselves and the world around them. The researchers then advocate for the introduction of school social work to

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strengthen the cognitive processing agency for young girls and educate guardians and teachers on interceptive child-protection practices that can assist them in monitoring their children's online presence for improved digital well-being.

Keywords: digital socialisation; identity; psychosocial challenges; generation-Z adolescent girls; school social work

Introduction

Information and communication technology advancement has received positive feedback, especially from Generation Z adolescents as it has greatly reduced information gaps (Mugari & Cheng, 2020; Nishida et al., 2019). Such an advancement has provided a digital space and a society where social interactions have been made easier (Dzoro et al., 2019). The digital space has also been used as a platform for socialisation and an informational well for issues such as acceptable behaviours within society, femininity, and gender roles (Mwangi et al., 2019). This means that social media and other informational platforms have in a way replaced the traditional forms of socialisation which in the African context were once assumed by parents, aunties, and the elders in societies. Nonetheless, the merit of ICT is not independent but rather dependent upon what the service user consumes, how they interpret the information, and how they use it. Savola et al. (2021) argue that there exist gender disparities in online risks and girls appear to bear the brunt of it due to social expectations and biological differences. To this end, the low cognitive and emotional capacities of adolescent girls as well as inadequate monitoring of online presence have led to various adverse implications on their mental health and self-identity in general (Mugari & Cheng, 2020; Dzoro et al., 2019). It is against this background that we explore these psychosocial challenges with the hope of restoring and strengthening child protection safety nets for girls in this digital era.

The millennium period has witnessed great changes in terms of the advancement in information and technology. Various social media platforms and applications have been introduced to enhance and aid the human experience (Yuan, 2022; Mugari & Cheng, 2020; Zinyama, 2019). Children

growing up now are surrounded by mobile devices and interactive social networking sites such as X (former Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, and Orkut which has made social media a vital aspect of their life. From the moment a child is born, he or she is exposed to both a social and digital environment, which affects the traditional socialisation process in one way or the other. In concurrence, Promina et al. (2020) and Dzoro et al. (2019) submit that human life as we know it is now greatly influenced by digitalization and informatization. Moreover, the SDG digital acceleration agenda recognises technology as a vehicle for the implementation and revitalization of the global partnership for sustainable development (SDG 17). It plays a crucial role in information dissemination to facilitate the attainment of all UN SDGs.

Relating to the utility of the digital economy by adolescents, Elgar (2014) disinterred that 92% of teens go online every day. This of course may vary from place to place due to the macro-economics of each nation and other related variables. For example, teens in urban areas may be more active on social media platforms than those in the rural areas of a typical developing country such as Zimbabwe. Nonetheless, this reality triggers the need for the reinterpretation of the issue of social formation and human development in the context of ontogenesis. Ontogenesis in this instance relates to the development of human beings through their life span. Consequently, the development of the 'Ama 2000' or "Generation Z or Gen-Z' requires interrogation as there are various variables that influence their growth and behavioural traits. Generation Z are people who were born between 1997 and 2012 and are sometimes referred to as the digital generation because of their exposure to digital technology. For Dolot (2018), Gen-Z teenagers were born and raised in a different environment than the older generations. The uniqueness of their circumstances such as the digital economy, thus exposes them to different forms of vulnerabilities.

This demands a closer scrutiny of this generation, more so, during the adolescent period of children's lifespan. According to Chitereka (2021), Rickson (2015) and Erikson (1982), adolescence for children from all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds is a critical developmental period that is characterized by major psychological, social, and cognitive changes. These

changes are always accompanied by biological and physical changes that may result in emotional instability. Due to such emotional turbulences, Chiweshe and Chiweshe (2017) submit that adolescence is often associated with identity construction, youth resistance and rebellion. More so, for the girls who tend to experience significant changes as they will be transitioning from childhood to womanhood. These variances are also attributable to sex changes and gender differences between the girl child and the boy child (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Changes such as breast development, body odour, pubic hair, acne, and menstrual periods may be alarming for adolescent girls. The digital era that we are living in allows alarmed adolescent girls to then turn to online platforms to understand the changes in their bodies. Findings from Savola et al. (2021) established the existence of gender disparities on the exposure to online risks with girls being more likely than boys to encounter specific risky situations while on online space. Although the role of gender is inevitably multifaceted, dynamic and complex, these findings seem to suggest that social, biological and emotional factors play a role in heightening the vulnerabilities of girls on the digital space. For example, the potential for girls to be the popular targets of harassment, violence and sexual abuse (Savola et al., 2021). These findings then show that girls experience social media threats differently to boys, making them a unique population.

While gender socialisation and sexuality roles were traditionally manned by uncles and aunties in African contexts such as Zimbabwe, this is no longer the case in most families (Dzoro et al., 2019; Chiweshe & Chiweshe, 2017). Mafa (2021) argues that there have been major shifts in the family structure and composition as traditional families which honoured extended families have now been replaced by nuclear families. However, due to the sensitive nature of issues surrounding sexuality and any sex-related issues in Zimbabwe (Chitereka, 2021; Gwatimba et al., 2020; Chiweshe & Chiweshe, 2017; Mutema, 2013), some guardians and parents have cultural reservations about openly discussing this with their children. Again, through acculturation and cultural erosion, there have been shifts in gender roles as most women have joined the economic space, relegating child-rearing duties to maids and

house help. A socialisation gap due to the generational gap has thus been created, forcing adolescent girls into digital socialisation.

Promina et al. (2020) define digital socialisation as a process mediated by all available digital technologies to provide a social experience. Digital socialisation can be used synonymously with social media, which is a description of the interactions between groups or individuals in which they produce, share, and sometimes exchange ideas, images, and videos over the internet and in virtual communities. Social networks transform the behaviour in which adolescents relate with their parents and peers (Nishida et al., 2019; Akram & Kumar, 2017). Such social experiences acquired from online interactions can then be fused with offline realities to develop a digital identity as part of one's real personality. It is in these desperate times that the girls turn to social media for answers. Regarding this, Elgar (2014) established that teenage girls text more than boys, typically 30 times a day. Dzoro et al. (2019) further noted a distinct pattern which suggested that sites visited were gendered between girls and boys.

Access to social media platforms is supported by the Constitution of Zimbabwe which accords even the youth and adolescents their digital rights (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013). These digital rights are also outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. With the passage of time, the development of philosophy, and technological progress, certain social relations change, and people including adolescents have many opportunities that did not exist before, such as gender reassignment, artificial insemination as well as the use of virtual reality (Barabash, 2023). The law as a system of legal norms must therefore provide an adequate response to these changes in the form of appropriate regulation to respond to the fourth generation of human rights. These however need to be enjoyed responsibly to lower the online risks that are associated with the utility of social media platforms. Since the advancement of technology has provided a social economy that can strengthen human relations, it has also presented difficult challenges especially to the younger

generation (Dzoro et al., 2019; Livingstone, Kirwil et al., 2014). Due to their underdeveloped cognitive and emotional response, young girls are often victims of social media abuse such as cyberbullying and shaming (Mugari & Cheng, 2020). Mafa et al. (2020) further identified a case where young girls under the age of 18 are victims of revenge porn, a phenomenon where scornful male lovers share nude pictures on social media to spite their ex-girlfriends. This can translate to a myriad of psychosocial challenges. Navigating through these social media platforms thus requires emotional and social skills if one is to exploit them for beneficial use.

The findings of this study on the mental health of adolescent girls have critical implications for Social Work Practice as the legal vanguard of children. It is also a profession which is anchored on ensuring the psychosocial well-being of individuals, groups and societies at large (Chigondo, 2019). Dupper (2003) and Teasly (2004) revealed the introduction of school social work within school settings in the global north to respond to related psychosocial challenges. According to Chigondo (2019), Teasley (2004) and Dupper (2003), school social work is a specialized field of practice which works with guardians, students and school administrators to respond to social, emotional and behavioural challenges for academic advancement. While the study was localized to Zimbabwe, these findings are transferable to all Gen-Z girls because the utility of social media as well as mental health issues are universal phenomena (Mutema, 2013; Nishida et al., 2019). Such findings can inform social work theory and practice through evidence-based initiatives.

Theoretical lenses
The study was guided by the psychosocial theory of development by Eric Erikson and the social learning theory by Albert Bandura. The two theories offer complementary roles in explaining the identity phenomenon and the digital socialisation concept respectively.

The social learning theory
Propounded by Bandura (1989), the theory submits that behaviour can be learned through observation, modelling, and imitating the behaviour which is

reinforced or supported by significant others. Such significant people in this digital era can be celebrities or people considered to be of worth in society. The power of social media platforms and how they can turn the whole world into an accessible village make it possible for young girls to see information and the lives of some people they may consider to be role models. Bandura and Locke (2003) argue that the presence of 'mirror neurons' in human bodies gives a biological explanation which validates the basis for imitating other people. These are the neurons that are triggered either if a person does something by themselves or if they observe someone else doing the same thing. The theory thus helps to explain social media content as the source of the behaviourism imitated by adolescent girls, even from remote areas.

Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of development

The psychosocial theory on the other hand is premised on what Erikson (1982) named the developmental stages of life for every individual. This is a lifespan theory of development that was greatly influenced by Freud's psychoanalytic theory. It incorporates the social and cultural factors as determinants of human behaviour. Again, unlike the psychoanalytic theory, the theory goes beyond childhood as is shown in Figure 1.0.

Erikson's Psychosocial Stages

Stage	Basic Conflict	Virtue	Description
Infancy 0–1 year	Trust vs. mistrust	Hope	Trust (or mistrust) that basic needs, such as nourishment and affection, will be met
Early childhood 1–3 years	Autonomy vs. shame/doubt	Will	Develop a sense of independence in many tasks
Play age 3–6 years	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose	Take initiative on some activities—may develop guilt when unsuccessful or boundaries overstepped
School age 7–11 years	Industry vs. inferiority	Competence	Develop self-confidence in abilities when competent or sense of inferiority when not
Adolescence 12–18 years	Identity vs. confusion	Fidelity	Experiment with and develop identity and roles
Early adulthood 19–29 years	Intimacy vs. isolation	Love	Establish intimacy and relationships with others
Middle age 30–64 years	Generativity vs. stagnation	Care	Contribute to society and be part of a family
Old age 65 onward	Integrity vs. despair	Wisdom	Assess and make sense of life and meaning of contributions

Fig 1.0 Derived from Erikson (1982)

The main argument of the theory is that every individual in their lifetime goes through eight psychosocial tensions which they should balance (Erikson, 1982). We focused on the fifth stage, the identity and identity confusion stage, where our target population is located. The theory, therefore, submits that the psychological processing of an individual as well as their social environment determines the virtue they ultimately exhibit. Mafa (2020) further argues that the identity tension is heightened at the adolescent stage because this is when the child becomes more exposed to the secondary and tertiary levels of socialisation, thereby increasing the level of exploration. At this age also, the girl child experiences biological changes which push her to explore more on these changes and the digital space becomes the readily available platform for this, thus digital socialisation. The information obtainable online together with the cognitive muscles and the social support will then determine whether the exploration will lead to identity realization or identity confusion.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Harare, at a selected private secondary school. This was chosen because Harare is an urban area with upgraded internet services. The private school caters for adolescents, mainly from medium-income families who can afford to give their children an internet-abled gadget in this harsh economy in Zimbabwe. We used a qualitative approach through a narrative design because we intended to elicit detailed information on the psychosocial challenges associated with social media use (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The narrative research design was preferred also because it allowed all participants to recite their personal experiences regarding the adverse effects of social media use. Semi-structured interviews were used for participants and key informants as they captured the responses and sentiments of participants in their natural settings, thereby giving rich information (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Convenience sampling was used to select 11 adolescent girls at the school, according to their availability and willingness to participate until data saturation was obtained.

The lead researcher, after obtaining institutional approval, targeted female adolescents who had internet-enabled gadgets as these were the inclusion

criteria. The purposive sampling strategy was preferred for the 4 key informants to ensure that only participants with expert insights on the phenomenon under study were chosen. The lead researcher used her judgment to pick participants who could provide valuable information to answer research questions. In relation to key informants, an ICT expert was chosen to provide technical information on how ICT works; a social worker provided great insight concerning the psychological processes and social dynamics that relate to social media use by adolescent girls; a guardian was picked to elicit information on the social media behaviours of teen girls while they are at home as well as their performance at school. Finally, a school principal was picked to comment on the behaviours they witnessed at school as adolescent girls navigate social media platforms. Two separate interview schedules were used to guide the interviews, ensuring that there were probing and follow-up questions for clarity.

Narrative analysis was used to analyse the collected data as it focuses on interpreting the main narratives from the study participants' stories. This data analysis method focused on extracting and interpreting the main narratives from female adolescents' personal stories. This means a dual layer of interpretation where the research participants use a first-person narrative to interpret their own lives through narratives. The researchers sought to understand how research participants construct meaning from their own experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data were organised according to how participants experienced the psychosocial challenges as a result of the utility of social media platforms. On top of narrative analysis, the researchers also developed themes by borrowing from thematic analysis. As such, the findings presented in the following section are presented in line with the themes that we developed during data analysis. Our focus was on getting participants' stories, but we felt that the best way to marshal the findings in an orderly manner was through themes.

Studies that deal with human life need to align with research ethics to ensure that participants are not exposed to harm. The study was guided by the ethics of confidentiality, informed consent as well as voluntary participation. The primary participants signed assent forms, while their parents signed consent

forms as the participants' guardians. The school principal also signed the informed consent form for institutional involvement. The key informants also signed informed consent forms to show their willingness to participate in the study. Before the commencement of the study, we obtained ethical clearance from the University's Ethics Research Board (17/2023).

Findings

The findings from this study revealed that while social media platforms provide a social economy which is beneficial, it is also marred with a myriad of psychosocial challenges which may pose adverse outcomes for the well-being of adolescent girls. Firstly, the results revealed that some girls struggled with accepting themselves and that they borrowed their role models' personalities. Other girls also shared that they struggled to accept their bodies as they were contrary to the ideal 'shape' presented on social media platforms. Apart from that, various variables led to social media addiction and some girls had low self-esteem due to the competitive environment which was prevalent in these social media outlets. These results are presented and discussed in detail in line with the themes (subsections) that follow.

Low self-efficacy

The findings indicated that Gen Z adolescent girls start using cell phones at a very early age. The participants revealed that they used their gadgets to do school work as well as for social interactions through social media platforms. As a social interaction modality, there were sentiments that girls competed for attention based on who gunners more followers or comments on media platforms. Those who had fewer followers felt less important in comparison to their peers. Direct quotes on these findings are given below:

> *My friends and I had cell phones when we were still in primary and I use them for school and to communicate with my friends on social media. Everyone wants to be that girl that is trending on social media so sometimes girls in my class compete for attention and it can be ugly because some girls feel like they are not as cool as the others who are known… (Adolescent 3)*

> *…girls who are more popular on social media sometimes bully others with memes and TikTok videos and it can affect one's confidence to even not come to school. Those who do not have many followers or likes are treated as nothing even in class, no one listens to them (Adolescent 6)*

> *These youngsters nowadays are introduced to cell phones and social media early on in life than we did. Yes, cell phones help them to do school work on modern applications. But some of them now are always on Facebook, and TikTok trying to imitate some popular people to be liked by their peers. If for example, they do not get comments as much as the other girls on their posts, they start feeling as though they are less important or less worthy… (Key informant, Principal)*

The findings above confirm that Generation Z girls are exposed to cell phones at an early age. They also establish the importance of such gadgets with schoolwork and social interactions. Given their emotional immaturity and underdeveloped cognitive skills, this questions their ability to navigate the digital space healthily. The results revealed that some use social media platforms in an unhealthy manner, using applications such as TikTok to gunner likes by bullying other peers. Berryman et al. (2018) argue that teenagers engage in competitive trends which are aimed at outdoing each other. Through these competitions, they receive more likes and comments, thereby attracting more money for their monetized YouTube and Instagram channels. In trying to explain this, Erikson (1982) submits that in trying to form self-image and self-worth during the adolescent period, there is a temptation to 'want to be taller by climbing on other people'. This simply means that the intrinsic tension coupled with biological and emotional tension at this developmental level if not managed well may lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms and sadistic tendencies as revealed by the findings. One can be consumed with the absurdity of social media, and pursue this popularity-based identity even at the expense of their values, relationships and ideology (Mafa, 2020). This subtle need for external validation can also

lead to low self-esteem for those girls who may not receive as many likes, being convinced that their worth is tied to the number of likes on some gadget.

Social media addiction

It was also unearthed from the study that some adolescent girls are addicted to social media platforms as they struggle to live without their gadgets and social media presence. This nomophobic behaviour was attributed to the fear of missing out on trending issues. It was further exacerbated by the fact that some parents do not monitor the activities as well as the level of social media exposure of their children. The key informant, a social worker argued that such a struggle may affect the performance of children in schools as they fail to balance their time between social media and school work. More clarity is given in the verbatim below:

> *The problem is that there is always something happening on social media. So, if you are away for too long you can miss out on what will be happening…you will just hear from others proving that you are behind (Adolescent, 9)*

> *My parents do not check on what I am doing with my phone or what time I leave social media platforms. I guess they just trust that I will be responsible but I think I am on social media a bit more than I should… (Adolescent, 2)*

> *If there are no control measures put in place our girls can be so distracted at school and even at home, glued on their gadgets to check out what is happening on social media. It's becoming a real issue because it's as if they are nothing without their gadgets and social media… (Key Informant, Social worker)*

The verbatim given above is a testimony of the prevalent behavioural challenges where adolescent girls are overly concerned with activities on social media and devote a lot of their time navigating social media platforms. While the utility of the internet or social media platforms is not in itself a bad thing, it becomes an addiction when it impairs other areas of one's life, in this

case, academic life and self-efficacy. A gap is therefore noted where there are no control mechanisms in place from the parents and possibly the school to provide safety measures that can safeguard the girls from being 'absorbed' by social media. Such imbalances become a problem when adolescent girls get driven by an uncontrollable urge to use social media, identifying with such platforms such that they fail to see their worth outside of these applications. In concurrence, Viner et al. (2019) reveal that the fear of missing out (FOMO) on trending issues is the breeding ground for social media addiction. Berryman et al. (2018) reiterate that platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are created with an addictive intention to trigger an insatiable screen appetite for example through the creation of 'trendy challenges.' As argued by Bandura and Locke (2003), adolescent girls are socialized by these platforms to continuously subscribe to such trends, which feed the addiction. Prensky (2001) calls children in this generation digital natives due to their level of exposure and dependency on digital tools for their daily activities.

Body dysmorphic tendencies

The study participants revealed that adolescent girls hated themselves if they had big bodies because they felt unattractive and unwanted. They admitted wanting skinny bodies as presented on social media platforms by role models they look up to. It was further discovered that those with big bodies were easy targets of bullying by other peers. The key informant also echoed that some of the adolescents were not aware that the celebrities they looked up to edited their bodies and faces to look a certain way. This is given below:

> *When you are a big girl even boys do not want to talk to you. So, no one wants to be chubby, we want to be like the girls and ladies we see on social media who are skinny… (Adolescent, 4)*

> *You get bullied when you are big. Everyone wants to be small because it's as if social media has set the standard for how girls should look (Adolescent, 1)*

> *This generation especially girls do not realize that many people edit their faces and bodies when they post on social media platforms.*

> *Now those girls that have say a bit of weight may hate their bodies and think that they are not good enough because they do not look as skinny… (Key Informant, IT expert)*

What is clear from the findings above is how social media has infiltrated the lives of Gen-Z adolescent girls to the extent of dictating their ideal body structure. Through digital socialisation, social media platforms have proposed an appearance-based identity that suggests that the girl child is what they look. This means that their self-worth is calculated based on the size of their body, leading to body dissatisfaction for those who do not fit the 'hourglass shape'. These findings find confirmation from Perry and Pauletti (2011) who disinterred that girls generally have poorer body image than boys and therefore invest in the 'thin ideal', overestimating males' preference for females with slender bodies. Interrogated through the social learning lenses, when there is an overemphasis on a phenomenon such as an ideal body type on social media, this socializes the mind into accepting such a proposition, building one's identity over it. Such a conclusion can be very problematic as it can lead to depression and an obsession with 'why don't I look like the girl on my screen' feeling.

Consequently, this can translate to anorexia, an eating disorder that is characterized by self-restriction of food to attain low body size, typically accompanied by an intense fear of gaining weight (Frostad & Bentz, 2022). This disorder is generally based on a perceived relationship between body size and image as well as the value of a person. What is unfortunate from the findings above is the fact that the girls are unaware that some of these images that are the centre of their comparison are photo-shopped and heavily altered using a software application. Yuan (2022) laments that almost every teen on social media is faking their lifestyle, by either posting flamboyant lifestyles or editing their bodies to fit the society's perceived image. Since this is a common occurrence in the digital space, it is not clear why young girls fail to understand that everyone including their role models may well be faking their lives and images as well, underscoring the highs of their lives and not their lows.

A 'borrowed identity'

The findings of this study further established the propensity of the girl child to assume their role models' lives in an attempt to present a certain identity to the world. Participants revealed that they sometimes changed the way they dressed and the way they presented themselves to look more like their online celebrities. This was attributed to the intrinsic desire to be liked and appreciated by peers. It also came from the findings that girls had more pressure from society to conduct themselves in a particular way which was considered ideal for a female. The key informants further revealed that girls may completely alter themselves so much that they become a copy of someone else in an attempt to fit in with peers. These findings find support from the verbatim below:

> *There are people we want to emulate on social media, especially those who are liked and have a good life. So sometimes we want to be like them and we imitate how they dress, the things they like…we feel like sometimes the emulation is taken too far (Adolescent 4)*

> *Agh, on social media, when buying clothes and the way we handle ourselves, we want people to see us and like us as the celebrities we admire. So, you can find girls trying as much as they can to be for example Cardi B. Others are even called by their favorite celebrity's names as their nicknames (Adolescent 11)*

> *In as much as social media is important, our girl child has a lot of pressure to conduct themselves in a certain way and they end up living a life which is not their own. They sometimes change their appearance, values and personalities so drastically and you wonder what happened to this child. The sad thing is that they hardly emulate positive behaviour (Key Informant, Social worker)*

The quotes above reveal the power of digital socialisation and its ability to influence one's personality and identity. It shows how one's character and life can be intertwined with another through the process of what Bandura calls social modelling in his theory of social learning (Bandura, 1989). Taking into

consideration Erikson's theory (1982), he argues that the adolescent period is characterized by high levels of exploration and commitment. The findings above confirm this proving that adolescent girls explore the lives of the role models on social media platforms they perceive as their inspirational ideal and they commit to being like them by modelling their behaviour. Mafa (2020) calls this a 'borrowed identity' personality where one perceives reality through other people's personalities. While the borrowed identity may be positive or negative, this is a distorted sense of self whereby one assumes another person or people's lifestyle and values. Of importance to highlight however is the mental tension which they have to contend with to keep up with the demands of living through someone else's life. This is because adolescent girls will have to suppress their ideologies, personal preferences, and characters to project that of their role models. Berryman et al. (2018) submit that this is more of a 'faking it until you make it' pretence which can be emotionally draining, especially for young girls.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study are critical in that they contribute to knowledge of child protection programming in both developing and developed countries as child protection is a global phenomenon. This means that both school authorities and caregivers, equipped with this information may adopt better ways of enhancing educational outputs for these girls as well as ensuring their good mental health. The paper has provided a holistic picture which speaks to the various uses of social media platforms by Gen-Z adolescents. Fig 1.1 below summarizes the conclusions, implications of findings as well as recommendations being proffered by this paper. The figure is further discussed in detail after**.**
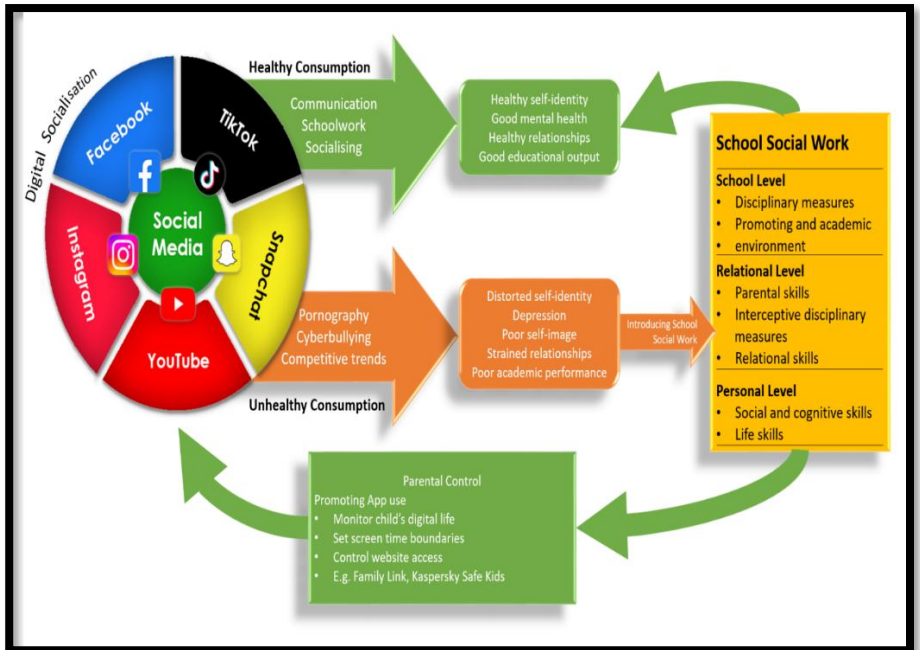
Fig1.1 Digital Socialisation and the School Social Work Model (Source: the researchers)

The study has established that children are growing up around mobile devices and interactive social networking sites which have made social media a vital aspect of their life. This has indubitably led to an over-dependency on social media platforms by adolescent girls which in some cases translates to social media addiction. This finding implies that this disrupts the social functioning of the girls as gadgets have sort of 'taken over' their lives in an unhealthy manner. Derailed educational focus and the possibility of aborted educational aspirations may be the result. A psychosocial support gap is therefore identified within the school environment to help adolescents with psychological and social challenges, including those triggered by unmonitored social media presence. This then calls for both a remedial and

preventative initiative which can respond to the psychosocial challenges associated with the advancement of digital technologies. A profession such as social work practice may be considered as it is both the custodian of children and a field which offers a holistic response to social ills within societies (Chitereka, 2019; Mafa & Simango, 2021).

Dzoro et al. (2019), Chitereka (2019) and Chigondo (2019) lament over the urgent need for social workers' presence in schools in Zimbabwe to safeguard children from mental health issues that have the potential to compromise learners' educational targets. For these reasons, the paper advocates for the adoption of the school social work model to be made mandatory for schools in Zimbabwe as a stopgap measure to respond to psychosocial-related menaces that emanate from young people within the school setting. School social workers are thus an integral link between students, school administrators and families, creating a favourable environment which can foster academic progress and digital detoxification. Notwithstanding that young people within the adolescent age spend most of their time within the confines of school premises and school administrators. This model can therefore help in restoring social functioning among adolescent girls within the school settings. This would entail school administrators with the help of school social workers craft programs and policies that can build internal agency to navigate the digital space productively and healthily. For example, the school could restrict gadget use during lessons to allow students to concentrate on their school work.

The study also concluded that at the relational level, there is minimal parental control of children's online presence. As a result, adolescents are over-indulging in their level of consumption of unhealthy social media content which is leading to mental health challenges such as low self-esteem. Against this background, social workers through their roles as educators can provide parents with parental skills which can ensure the safety of children from the farcicality of social media. This may involve teaching parents and guardians on best child protection practices. The home as the primary agent of socialisation should provide the safety nets to enable healthy emotional, psychological and physical development. Moreover, social workers as the

legal custodians of children appreciate human behaviour and child development as well as the challenges associated with that (Mushohwe, 2018). They are therefore able to also equip parents and teachers with rights-based disciplinary practices that will bring some form of 'screen time' boundaries on the use of social media platforms.

These practices may also create a safe environment for adolescents to discuss their social media fears, challenges such as cyberbullying and problematic stereotypes projected by social media platforms such as ideal body types and expected gender roles. School social workers can utilize family therapy skills and interventions to restore and repair relationships between guardians and their adolescent girls. This is with an understanding that the adolescent period is characterized by heightened emotional and mental changes that can be problematic in the absence of professional help (Chitereka, 2021; Dzoro et al., 2019; Rickwood, 2015). As a regulatory mechanism, school social workers can also encourage guardians and parents to embrace technology and applications that can assist in monitoring children's online presence. Applications such as Family Link and Kaspersky Safe Kids may prove to be of great assistance in monitoring the sites that are visited by adolescent girls, the amount of time they spend on social media platforms as well as the general content they consume.

The applications work almost in the same manner as the Television and the Netflix parental control guide. Through their permission management function, the applications allow guardians to make meaningful choices about their children's data. These applications can be installed on the guardian's phone or computer to allow them to view and manage permissions for all websites accessed through the internet as well as monitor all applications downloaded on their children's devices. By so doing, age-inappropriate content can easily be blocked thereby safeguarding the mental wellbeing of the child. The bonus of these applications is that they enable the guardians to locate the location of their children by tracing their phones, more like the car tracker GPS. Chigwedere et al. (2022) emphasised the need for regulatory measures within the utility of ICT for transparency and protection. This submission is truer for children whose cognitive processes are immature to

relate their actions on social media platforms with psycho-social consequences.

Strengthening the relationship between parents and their adolescent children is critical in shaping their concept of self because caregivers are the primary socialisation mirrors and therefore primary role models (Bandura & Locke, 2003). Through school social work, practitioners can also assume their roles as empowerment to build agency for adolescents, equipping them with necessary life skills. When personal convictions are strengthened, the girls will be able to find comfort in their skin and not through the eyes of their social media role models or by defining their self-worth by the number of likes on their posts. This will inevitably ensure a healthy self-identity, healthy relationships and realized educational outputs.

Limitations
The fact that the study focused only on a private school may pose a limitation to transferring findings to public schools. However, the findings provide exploratory information which can trigger a wider study which may also include the quantitative approach to strengthen the findings. Again, the small sample used in the study may limit the generalizability of findings. The study triangulated two data sources to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings through the verification process.

Conclusion
The findings of this study have put to the fore the various hurdles this digital generation has to contend with as they explore the possibilities made available through social media platforms. While the benefits of the advancement in technology are irrefutable, the paper's evidence on the ground also testifies to the truism of its adverse ramifications on the mental health of Gen-Z adolescents. Given that adolescents spend most of their time within school settings, the paper has recommended the introduction of the school social work model, a field within social work which works with guardians, school administrators and children to tackle behavioural and mental health-related issues for academic excellence. With social workers'

various roles, they can use a multi-stakeholder approach to respond to the various menaces that emanate from the unhealthy utility of social media by adolescent girls.

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The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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