



# Exploring the Prevalence and Patterns of Media Exposure and Use among Adolescent Generation Z in Secondary Schools in Western Kenya: A Focus on Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya Counties

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study was to explore media exposure patterns among school-going Generation Z adolescents in Western Kenya, specifically in Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya Counties. By providing crucial insights into the media habits of these adolescents, the study aims to enhance understanding of youth media behavior and its developmental impacts. The findings could inform educational policies, parental guidance, content regulations, and health initiatives to address issues such as screen addiction and cyberbullying. The study applied Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Development to explore the media habits of adolescents in an exploratory context. Using descriptive and correlational research designs that included questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and content analysis, data was collected from a sample of 384 learners drawn from a population of 190,555 learners using a stratified random sampling method. Additionally, 56 parents and 48 teachers were selected based on the principle of data saturation. A pilot study conducted in Vihiga County with 42 learners yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.87. Expert faculty members assessed the instruments for face validity. The study adhered to the Kenya Data Protection Act of 2019, ensuring ethical procedures such as informed consent from principals, participant anonymity, and thorough training for research assistants. The data was analyzed using a mixed-methods approach that combined descriptive statistics for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for the qualitative insights. Findings reveal that Generation Z adolescents have widespread access to media, primarily engaging with social media (38%), with at least 35% using media for over 6 hours, notably on social media and mobile phones. A significant portion (35%) of their media consumption occurs without parental supervision, prominently on social media (40.7%) and mobile phones (28.2%). Media serves dual purposes for these adolescents, with radio and television primarily used for education (32% and 31.8%), while mobile phones and social media are predominantly for entertainment (34.6% and 25%). The study concluded that social media is widely used among adolescent Generation Z learners, with substantial daily engagement and minimal parental supervision. This study recommends implementing digital literacy programs, setting screen time limits, and integrating educational content into popular digital platforms, particularly targeting adolescent Generation Z. Schools should collaborate with content creators to enhance learning through engaging, interactive materials.*

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Generation Z, Media Exposure, Parental Oversight, Social Media

## I. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, represents a shift from traditional to digital media. As digital natives, they have grown up immersed in the rapid evolution of technology, moving beyond traditional platforms like television and radio to embrace a diverse range of digital media. The term "media" refers to electronic or electromechanical technologies used to store and distribute information to users (Delfanti & Arvidsson, 2019). Traditionally, this included television and radio, but today it also encompasses mobile phones, video games, social media platforms, and software that enable data access, retrieval, storage, transmission, and manipulation. These digital natives are not only early adopters but also innovators, using smartphones, social media, and online communities to express themselves and forge connections on a global scale.

Studies indicate a significant increase in electronic media accessibility among youths, both at home and in school, particularly in technologically advanced countries like the United States, where Generation Z exemplifies this trend. For example, according to the latest available data, every American adolescent of Gen Z will have viewed approximately 500,000 TV adverts by the time he/she leaves school (Kaur et al., 2019). Furthermore, Hurwitz et al., (2020) point out that young adults in the US spend double the time watching television than they spend reading books. These observations underscore how the constant availability of electronic media shapes Generation Z's consumption



habits, identity formation, and cultural integration (Serbanescu, 2022). Their ongoing interaction with digital media profoundly influences the way they learn, communicate, and perceive the world (Bourke, 2019).

A growing body of research highlights Generation Z's increasing dependence on digital media and social platforms, a trend that spans across different countries and cultures. A global analysis of 19 European Union countries showed that 80% of school-age Gen Z use smartphones to access the internet daily (Smahel et al., 2020). Moreover, the study revealed that internet use among this generation has increased significantly over the years to a stage where it has almost doubled since 2010 among this group. Donelle et al. (2021) conducted a study that showed that 57% of the Canadian adolescent Gen Z have embraced the use of social media platforms such as YouTube, Snapchat, and Facebook. More specifically, 79%, 67%, and 33% of the respondents use YouTube, Snapchat, and Facebook, respectively. A cross-sectional study of young people in Austria in 2022 found that as many as 77% of young Austrians use TikTok daily as reported by the Youth Internet Monitor (Sackl-Sharif et al., 2022). Similarly, the 2021 Internet Use and Social Media Report in Denmark revealed that almost all (87%) Gen Zs aged 12 to 18 had at least one social media account, half of them were active on two to five platforms, and the rest were on six to eight (O'Neill, 2023).

In Africa, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, patterns of mobile phone access among Generation Z adolescents reveal a distinct reliance on shared connectivity as opposed to regions like Europe and the United States. For instance, Wang et al (2022) conducted a survey that determined the level of access to smart devices for Gen Z adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa and found that possession of mobile phones was much lower for this group than for young adults in America or European countries. Specifically, the findings indicated the rates in Tanzania, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Burkina Faso to be 3%, 13%, 36%, and 40% respectively. However, the rate of access to any phone, whether owned or not was 56%, 80%, 95%, and 70% in the same countries respectively. This suggests that in Sub-Saharan Africa, usage of mobile phones does not solely depend on personal ownership. Rather, there is evidence of prevalent patterns of shared access and connectivity facilitated by these devices within the region.

In Kenya, the rapid growth of internet and technology use is evident, with internet penetration reaching 87.2%, including 46.8 million mobile data users and 7 million Facebook users (Cowling, 2024). Popular social media platforms among Kenyans include WhatsApp, X Space, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, indicating a high level of digital engagement. However, access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and other media platforms remains uneven, with rural areas, the Coastal Region, and the North Eastern parts of the country experiencing significantly lower levels of access (Mwita, 2021). Despite these regional disparities, internet use has surged; in January 2020 alone, the number of internet users in Kenya rose by 16%, reaching 22.86 million and achieving a 43% internet penetration rate (Kemp, 2020).

Among Generation Z youth aged 10 to 21, a 2020 survey revealed that 32% had internet accounts despite age restrictions that require users to be at least 18. Furthermore, 16% of these adolescents accessed adult-themed content, and 5% participated in online gambling (Kemp, 2020).

Residents of Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya counties have significantly greater access to media technology than their neighbouring counties. For instance, the 2019 Population and Housing Census revealed that 45.8% of the population aged 3 and above in Siaya County owned mobile phones, a higher percentage than those in the neighboring counties of Busia (37.8%), Kakamega (41.4%), Vihiga (45.4%) and Homabay (41.5). Furthermore, household access to radio (65.5%), computer (4.2%), television (28.3%) and internet (8.3%) in Siaya county was higher than that of neighboring Busia (54.5%; 3.7%; 27.2%; 7.4% respectively) as reported by Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2019). In Kisii, the same census report indicates that among the population aged years and above, ownership of mobile phones (44.6%) and household access to computer (5%), TV (30.7%), and internet (8.8%) was higher than that of neighboring Narok (32.4%; 2.7%; 19.3%; 6.9%) and Migori (36.5%; 4.2%; 28.1%; 3.9%) Counties. The same trend was observed in Kakamega County. Worth noting too is that access to radio in the three counties (Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya), exceeded the national one.

It is important to note that the statistics pertaining to media use in Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya Counties are primarily derived from census reports. These reports provide a broad overview of demographics and technology access, suggesting the extent of media usage within households. Access to media is a recognized predictor of media usage patterns (Cabello et al., 2018). However, census data typically encompasses the entire population rather than relying on sample-based methods, which limits insights into the nuanced behaviors, attitudes, and social implications of media use among adolescents in this specific region. This lack of detailed exploration leaves researchers and policymakers without critical insights into how media exposure influences the psychosocial development, cultural identity, educational experiences, and social dynamics of young people in Western Kenya. Furthermore, there is a significant absence of focused studies addressing media access levels specifically among adolescent Generation Z in these areas. Consequently, this study aims to evaluate the prevalence and patterns of media exposure and use among



adolescent Gen Z learners in the Western Region of Kenya, specifically targeting Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya Counties.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

In today's digital age, adolescents are immersed in a wide range of media sources, including social media, television, streaming platforms, and online content. Generation Z, in particular, has grown up with unprecedented access to digital platforms, which deeply influence their social interactions, learning processes, and worldview (Weru, 2018). While global research increasingly examines the effects of media on adolescents, there remains limited data on the prevalence and patterns of media exposure among adolescents in rural and semi-urban regions of Kenya, particularly in Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya counties. Existing census reports provide only ecological data on media access in these areas without specifically addressing how Generation Z learners engage with media, the types of media they consume, or the duration of their exposure (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

Although the World Health Organisation (WHO) does not set specific recommendations for the ideal amount of time children should spend using media, it strongly advises that adolescents should not allow media consumption to overshadow essential activities such as getting adequate sleep, maintaining regular physical activity, enjoying family meals, or spending time on non-digital, 'unplugged' leisure pursuits. Understanding the media consumption habits of adolescents in these regions is critical, as it may have far-reaching implications for their academic performance, social behavior, and mental well-being (WHO, 2020).

Numerous studies globally have examined adolescent access to media. For example, in the United States, a literature review by Twenge et al. (2019), covering 40 years of research, identified clear trends in media use among adolescents, noting a shift from traditional formats like radio and television to modern digital platforms. Similarly, Boer et al. (2020) conducted a survey across 29 developed countries, focusing on adolescents' access to social media. This study highlighted a significant relationship between social media usage and well-being, concluding that higher social media use correlated with poorer mental health outcomes. In Africa, studies conducted in South Africa (Salubi et al., 2019), Tanzania (Pfeiffer et al., 2014), and Nigeria (Akokuwebe et al., 2019) have all centered on adolescent social media use. In Kenya, research has primarily been conducted in urban areas such as Nairobi (Kharono et al., 2022), Kiambu (Ng'ethe, 2014), and the coastal region (British Broadcasting Corporation Media Action, 2020).

Despite the above studies having been conducted both globally and within Kenya, there is a significant gap in localized studies specific to Western Kenya. Though census reports show that counties like Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya have relatively high access to various forms of media, such as television, radio, internet, and mobile phones there is a lack of detailed insights into how adolescents in these regions actually use media. This absence of focused research poses challenges for educators, policymakers, and guardians who need accurate information to develop effective strategies for mitigating the potential negative impacts of media and encouraging positive media engagement.

To address this gap, this study investigates the prevalence and patterns of media exposure among Generation Z learners in Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya counties. The findings are intended to provide essential data that can inform interventions and contribute to evidence-based decisions aimed at supporting healthy adolescent development in these regions.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To identify the types of media accessed by adolescent Generation Z learners in Secondary Schools in Kakamega, Kisii and Siaya Counties, Kenya
- ii. To evaluate the average daily duration of media consumption among adolescent Generation learners in Secondary Schools in Kakamega, Kisii and Siaya Counties, Kenya.
- iii. To examine the frequency of unsupervised media use among adolescent Generation Z learners in Secondary Schools in Kakamega, Kisii and Siaya Counties, Kenya.
- iv. To investigate the primary reasons for media usage among adolescent Generation Z learners in Secondary Schools in Kakamega, Kisii and Siaya Counties, Kenya.

### 1.3 Research Questions

- i. What types of media are accessed by adolescent Generation Z learners in secondary schools in Kakamega, Kisii and Siaya Counties, Kenya?
- ii. What is the average daily duration of media consumption among adolescent Generation Z learners in secondary schools in Kakamega, Kisii and Siaya Counties, Kenya?
- iii. How frequently do adolescent Generation Z learners in secondary schools in Kakamega, Kisii and Siaya Counties use media without parental supervision?



- iv. What are the primary reasons for the use of different forms of media among adolescent Generation Z learners in secondary schools in Kakamega, Kisii and Siaya Counties, Kenya?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

#### 2.1.1 Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Development

This study employs Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of development to provide a framework for understanding the media use patterns among adolescent Generation Z learners. Erikson's theory outlines eight stages of human development, each characterized by a central psychosocial conflict that individuals must navigate to achieve healthy psychological growth (Youvan, 2024). The fifth stage, Identity vs. Role Confusion, is particularly relevant for adolescents, as this period is critical for forming personal identities and establishing social connections.

In the context of this study, Erikson's theory emphasizes the role of social interactions and media in shaping adolescents' identities. During this developmental stage, individuals are exploring their self-concept, often influenced by peer interactions and societal expectations. Media, particularly social media platforms, serves as a prominent avenue for adolescents to experiment with their identities, seek validation, and navigate complex social dynamics (Vannucci & McCauley, 2019).

Furthermore, Erikson highlights the importance of social relationships in identity formation. As adolescents engage with various forms of media, they are not only consumers of content but also participants in a broader social landscape that can significantly impact their self-perception and social roles. Erikson's psychosocial theory therefore offers a framework for examining the patterns of media consumption among Generation Z learners and its relationship to their identity development during adolescence.

### 2.2 Empirical Review

The first objective of this study was to determine the different types of media accessed by these learners. Prior research highlights that smartphones are a leading medium, with 75% of teenagers aged 14 to 17 in the United States owning them (Adjin-Tettey, 2018). In a similar vein, studies in India indicate that 85% of children aged 11 to 17 have smartphones (Kumar, 2022). While specific data for Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya are unavailable, global trends suggest that digital devices are likely significant in media access among Kenyan adolescents. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate similar information specifically within these three counties.

Regarding the second objective, which focuses on the average daily duration of media consumption among adolescent Generation Z learners, it is notable that American youth reportedly spend up to 28 hours per week watching television (Livingstone et al., 2017). In a different context, research conducted in Canada indicates that 93% of 12-year-olds have regular access to television, averaging 3 hours of daily viewing (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). Worth noting is that that kind of data is missing in the three counties, hence the need for this study to investigate the average daily duration of media consumption among adolescents in these three counties.

The literature further indicates that a significant portion of media consumption occurs without oversight; for example, studies show that a large percentage of adolescents engage with social media independently (Weru, 2023).

Furthermore, this study seeks to investigate the primary motivations behind the use of different forms of media among adolescent Generation Z learners. Previous research suggests that traditional media, such as radio and television, are primarily utilized for educational purposes, with 32% and 31.8% of adolescents reporting their use for learning, respectively (Weru, 2023). In contrast, digital media platforms like mobile phones and social media are predominantly used for entertainment, with 34.6% and 25% of adolescents indicating these as their main motivations for usage.

According to Kabali et al. (2015), media exposure is 'the extent to which audience members have come across particular messages or media content' (p. 168). This definition only focuses on simply coming into contact with the content, without necessarily paying attention to it. The spectrum of media available to Gen Z has expanded significantly, encompassing traditional formats such as books, newspapers, and television, and now extending to cable television, videos, video games, and the internet. Social media functions as an influential "super-peer," and the social interactions of adolescent Gen Z are progressively facilitated through electronic devices (Vannucci et al., 2020). Studies have found that adolescent Gen Z in both industrialized and developing countries are immersed in a pervasive electronic media environment, underscoring the global reach and influence of digital media on these digital natives (Livingstone et al., 2017).

Digital devices have become widely accessible to Generation Z, significantly shaping their media consumption habits. In the United States, members of this generation reportedly spend up to 28 hours per week watching television, excluding additional time spent on video games and internet browsing. Chassiakos et al. (2016)



further observed that American adolescents dedicate 27% of their daily media use to computers and gaming consoles, with a notable preference for using computers primarily for gaming. Additionally, approximately 75% of teenagers aged 14 to 17 own smartphones, reflecting the pervasive availability of media devices among adolescents and raising concerns about the potential effects on youth. Similarly, the ownership of tablets among families with younger children (aged 8 and below) increased fivefold between 2011 and 2013, mirroring the rising access to other smart devices (Chang et al., 2018).

The studies conducted in the United Kingdom show that there is a game console in 50% of the households. Youngsters between 8-18 years use different media types for about 5 hours per day (Mullan, 2018). In Canada, research indicates that 93% of 12-year-old children have regular access to television, with an average viewing time of 3 hours per day, surpassing the time devoted to other activities (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). Furthermore, Summerfield (2023) did a study among youth aged 7 to 17, which indicated that 7 out of 10 children in this age group engage with social media, with significant variations between younger and older demographics. This author further reports that ownership of a personal cellphone significantly influences usage, with 88% of children with their own phone using social media compared to 52% without. This significant media consumption may overshadow other social interactions, potentially countering recommendations that emphasize the importance of adequate social interactions for psychological development.

Asia also reports similar widespread media usage among adolescent Gen Z. For example, research indicates that Indian children aged 11 to 17 spend an average of 2 hours per day consuming media, with 74% using cell phones (Ahmed, 2012). Further, another survey done by Kumar (2022) reveals significant trends in both smart-phone and internet usage in this category of age. This study revealed that 85% of Generation Z individuals aged 11 to 17 own a smartphone, with 80% of them actively using social media. Additionally, the average daily time spent on online media among this group is 5 hours.

The contemporary adolescent Gen Z in Africa has universal access to media. Nigeria serves as a notable example, where 96.7% of this population engages with mass media in various ways, including for educational purposes and entertainment (Odofin & Igabari, 2023). Furthermore, a study conducted in South Africa on children aged 6 to 16 investigated their media usage behaviors and found that 31.8% of this age group used mobile phones, with an average daily call time of up to 75 minutes (Chetty-Mhlanga et al., 2020). In addition, 46% of the participants use electronic media devices with a total screen time of up to 7 hours. Further research highlights significant disparities in media access among South African adolescent Generation Z, influenced by factors such as socio-economic status, geography, race, age, education, and gender. In 2011, statistics showed that 64.8% of this population had no internet access. Of those who did, 16.3% accessed it via cell phones, 8.6% from home, 4.7% at work, and 5.6% from other locations. This digital divide favors affluent, urban, and educated populations, deepening inequalities for rural and lower socio-economic groups (Van der Merwe, 2013).

Most data regarding media accessibility in Kenya comes from surveys focused on ecological measures rather than actual usage. However, these statistics indicate significant potential for engaging Generation Z. A report by the Kenya Film Commission in 2010 found that 59% of Kenyan households have access to television, with a strong preference for local programming and peak viewership occurring in the evenings (Njeru, 2023). Additionally, radio remains the most widely accessible media platform, reaching over 85% of households, while mobile phone penetration is rapidly increasing nationwide. Notably, there are disparities in media access within Kenyan households, with rural areas showing significantly lower access rates compared to urban regions, primarily due to economic limitations and differences in electricity availability (Gustafsson & Nielsen, 2017). The Coastal and North Eastern regions, in particular, suffer from inadequate media access. Furthermore, access to media in Kenya, especially through mobile phones, is susceptible to economic fluctuations, leading users to borrow from friends to maintain their internet connection.

The researcher found no studies specifically examining media exposure among youths, particularly the adolescent Generation Z population in Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya Counties, highlighting a significant research gap. Understanding media exposure during adolescence is crucial for assessing its implications on identity formation, peer influence, and overall well-being of these youths in these regions. Furthermore, existing literature primarily relies on census data that estimate media access based on availability rather than reflecting actual usage patterns. To address these gaps comprehensively, this study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating ecological studies to assess media availability with survey-based research to gather data on actual usage patterns among adolescent Gen Z in Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya Counties.

In conclusion, while substantial research has explored media access and consumption among adolescents globally, localized studies focusing on the experiences of youth in Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya remain limited. This empirical review emphasizes the need for further exploration to understand the unique media contexts and implications for youth development in these regions.



### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Study Design

The study applied both descriptive and correlational research designs. Self-administered questionnaires which sought to elicit demographic information on the students as well as specific information on the frequency, length and context of exposure to different forms of media were completed by 384 learners who were 15-16 years old. In addition to this, quantitative data was also collected through interviews with 56 parents and 7 focus group discussions conducted with the lead teachers.

#### 3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Western Kenya, specifically Kakamega, Kisii and Siaya Counties.

#### 3.3 Study Population and Sampling Techniques

The target population was 14 to 17-year-old learners, drawn from both public and private secondary schools in these three counties, though data collection specifically focused on the median ages of 15 and 16. Using Krejcie and Morgan's formula for determination of sample size (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970), a sample size of 417 was selected. A stratified random sampling technique was employed due to the dispersed nature of the target population across three counties and varying school categories. These factors were expected to influence socioeconomic status, which in turn could affect access to media technologies. Therefore, the learners were initially divided into three strata based on their county (Kakamega, Kisii, or Siaya), then further into four sub-strata based in the school category (National, Extra-County, County, or Sub-County). Finally, a sample was randomly selected from each sub-stratum, proportionate to the respective populations within the larger population of the study. Additionally, 56 parents and 48 teachers were selected using stratified random sampling, with the sample size determined by data saturation.

#### 3.4 Instruments

Data collection employed multiple methods: questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. The questionnaire consisted of 27 questions in Likert scale, multiple choices, and one open-ended format. It gathered self-reported data on both ecological measures of potential exposure and assessments of actual individual media interactions including the type of media consumed, the frequency, duration, and purposes for usage, focusing on the past six months. Respondents also provided details about average daily time spent on media, context of usage, device ownership, internet access, presence of a television in their bedrooms, and their favorite social networking sites and TV shows. This questionnaire was administered face-to-face.

The interview schedule consisted of nine open-ended questions aimed at gathering qualitative data that would help in understanding parents' views on media accessibility patterns among adolescent learners. Both face-to-face and telephone one-on-one interviews were conducted and recorded.

Additionally, six focus groups, each consisting of eight teachers from various school categories (national, extra-county, county, and sub-county), participated in 25-minute discussion sessions, which were recorded. These sessions provided qualitative data on the types of media commonly accessed by students and the purpose for which they were used. The discussions were conducted through a blended approach, combining face-to-face and virtual meetings.

#### 3.5 Validity and Reliability

##### 3.5.1 Validity

Prior to the development of the instruments, an extensive literature review was carried out to identify established scales and conceptualize the main constructs of the study, specifically those measuring media exposure. This provided essential insights that informed the creation of the initial items for the three instruments. Then, the instruments went through an assessment by experts in the field of media studies. This process enabled the identification of any gaps as well as the inclusion of all the essential elements.

##### 3.5.2 Reliability

A pilot study was conducted with 42 learners selected from Vihiga County to assess the reliability of the questionnaire using the test-retest method. The questionnaire was administered to the pilot sample twice, with a two-week interval between administrations. This resulted in a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.87, indicating a satisfactory level of reliability.



### 3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics, thus employing percentages, frequency counts, and means. For instance, frequency counts were used to analyze various dimensions of media access. Additionally, percentages were calculated to determine the proportion of learners with access to specific types of media. This data was then presented in tables and graphs.

Qualitative data gathered from interviews and focus group discussions was transcribed and converted into written form. To interpret the data, common patterns, themes, and sub-themes were identified from the transcriptions. These findings were then reported through written summaries and the inclusion of relevant excerpts from the qualitative data.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Prevalence of Exposure to Media by Type

Participants were required to indicate all the types of media they had interacted with in the previous 6 months with the options being radio, television, mobile phone, and social media. They were allowed to give multiple responses; hence the total number of responses indicating access to some form of media was 486. Results were as summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Media Access by Type*

Type of Media	Number of Users	% (N=486)
Radio	169	35%
Television	37	8%
Social Media	186	38%
Mobile Phone	94	19%

Social media had the highest access (38%) followed by radio (35%). Similar reports were further gathered from the analysis of data obtained from focus group discussions, where social media emerged as the most frequently accessed form of media among this population, as reported by teachers. Radio and television also stood out as significant themes in the data. However, in contrast, references to mobile phone usage were less frequent, and other unspecified forms of media received the least mentions.

These findings, where social media emerged as the preferred platform among adolescents, are consistent with broader research trends. Anderson and Jiang (2018) reported that U.S. teens frequently choose social media for communication and entertainment, with 95% having access to a smartphone. Similarly, Odgers (2018) highlighted the role of social media in adolescent development, noting its popularity for maintaining social connections. In Kenya, Aboagye et al. (2020) found a similar shift towards social media platforms among urban youth, who favor them for information and social interactions, further indicating a decline in traditional media use. On the contrast, some studies challenge this trend, suggesting that traditional media retains relevance in certain contexts. Smahel et al. (2020) emphasized that traditional media, like television, continues to play a key role, especially among younger teens that might have restricted internet use. Likewise, Julius (2020) observed that in rural Kenyan communities, radio and television are still primary media sources due to digital limitations. These findings suggest that while social media is dominant, media consumption patterns can vary significantly based on socioeconomic and regional factors.

The preference for social media and mobile phones highlights a significant trend toward personalized media consumption, granting individuals greater autonomy in how they engage with the media. This shift reflects the adolescents' desire for increased independence and the formation of connections outside their immediate family environment. Such behavior aligns with key developmental milestones of this age group, as they seek to establish a sense of identity and belonging within broader social networks.

In the interviews and discussions, this study noted that adolescent learners rely on cyber cafés as the main source for accessing social media. This is particularly the case given the fact that mobile phone possession is relatively low among these youths given restrictions from schools or homes. The accessibility of cyber cafés poses challenges for adult supervision, as they often provide unrestricted internet access and exposure to potentially inappropriate content. This lack of direct supervision raises concerns regarding the safety, privacy, and responsible digital media use among adolescents.



#### 4.2 Length of Exposure to Different Types of Media

To find out the average daily duration of media consumption over the past 6 months, participants were prompted to specify the number of hours they spent daily on each medium. Options provided included 0 hour, 1-2 hours, 3-4 hours, 5-6 hours and finally above 6 hours. Their responses were as summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Average Daily Duration of Media Use*

Duration	Radio	Television	Mobile Phone	Social Media	Totals
0 hours	169 (35%)	37 (8%)	94 (19%)	186 (38%)	486 (32%)
1 to 2 hours	139(30%)	44 (9%)	142 (31%)	140 (30%)	465 (30%)
3 to 4 hours	64(22%)	107 (37%)	46 (16%)	75 (27%)	292 (19%)
5 to 6 hours	13(11%)	53 (46%)	28 (25%)	21 (18%)	115 (7%)
Above 6 hours	19 (11%)	47 (26%)	56 (32%)	56 (32%)	178 (12%)

Table 2 further indicates that out of the 1536 responses, 178 (12%) indicated that they spent at least 6 hours (25% of the day) on one form of media or the other. Among these, social media and mobile phones equally stood out as the predominant choices, each representing 32% of the responses. Television and radio were used to a lesser degree, at 26% and 11% respectively.

The finding that social media is the most preferred media platform among adolescents who spend more than six hours daily online, aligns with other global studies where social media platforms dominate screen time among teenagers. Pinho et al. (2017) noted a significant rise in adolescents spending extended hours on social media, attributing this trend to platforms like Instagram and TikTok, which offer continuous, personalized content. Additionally, Valkenburg (2022) emphasized that adolescents' preference for social media is driven by the need for peer interaction and validation, contributing to extended daily engagement. However, other studies suggest that traditional media still retains significant usage among adolescents, especially for long periods. Thomas et al. (2021) found that television continues to be a preferred medium for extended viewing, particularly among younger teens who engage with family-friendly content and streaming services. In addition, Coyne et al. (2014) observed that while social media use dominates, a substantial portion of adolescents still spends extended time on TV series and movies accessed through online streaming platforms.

This is a significant length of time, especially considering that at this age there is a range of other competing tasks that need attention, including physical exercise, studies, social interactions and rest. Indeed, parents who participated in the interview were concerned that their adolescent children often 'forgot' to engage in other activities including school homework, personal hygiene, sleep and having meals because they were constantly engrossed in *TikTok*. Worth noting is that the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a healthy balance between time spent on the media and time spent on these other activities as an important pre-requisite for the overall well-being of adolescents (World Health Organization, 2020).

These findings also suggest a notable trend toward personalized media consumption, which affords individuals greater autonomy in their media engagement. This shift may signify adolescents' pursuit of increased independence and a move towards establishing connections beyond their immediate familial settings, which aligns with typical developmental characteristics of this demographic.

#### 4.3 Context of Use of Different Types of Media

The participants' use of various forms of media in the absence of their parents was assessed to determine the levels of media co-use between parents and their adolescent children. This was measured on a 3-point Likert scale from Always to Never. Results were as indicated in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Frequency of Media Use in the Absence of Parents*

Frequency	Radio	Television	Mobile Phone	Social Media
Always- 468 (35%)	13%	18%	28%	41%
Sometimes- 672 (51%)	29%	25%	26%	20%
Never- 188(14%)	41%	29%	20%	10%

It was observed that 468 responses, representing 35% of the total (N=1328), indicated consistent media use without parental involvement. Among this group, social media was the most commonly used, followed by mobile phones, TV, and then radio. In contrast, 188 responses, or 14% of the total (N=1328), indicated never engaging with



media without parental involvement. Among these, radio was the most frequently used, followed by TV, mobile phones, and social media. Therefore, social media emerged as the leading medium for private media use, with mobile phones closely following.

The study revealed that social media was the most frequently used media platform without parental involvement among adolescents. This observation aligns with Smahel et al. (2020), who found that adolescents often favor social media due to its private and independent nature, allowing them to interact with peers away from parental supervision. Similarly, Corcoran et al. (2022) reported that social media, accessible through mobile phones, is a primary medium where adolescents seek autonomy, leading to reduced parental monitoring. Lauricella and Cigel (2020) also noted that many adolescents prefer social media as it offers a personalized experience, which contrasts with the more controlled environments of traditional media like TV and radio.

This finding carries significant implications, as social media enables individuals to engage with audiences from diverse geographical areas, cultures, and family systems. Without proper regulation, it can significantly shape users' belief systems and behaviors. This is particularly crucial during adolescence, a stage where identities, beliefs, and behaviors are highly pliable and less stable, making them susceptible to influence from various, and often random, online sources. Moreover, the findings underscore the challenges parents face in monitoring social media and mobile phone use, as these platforms are far more difficult to supervise than traditional media like television and radio. Unlike the latter, managing social media and mobile phone use requires more than just parental controls and content filters, as the complexity of these platforms calls for more nuanced approaches to regulation.

#### 4.4 Reason for Use of Different Types of Media

Participants were asked to specify the primary reason for using different types of media. Results were as summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Reason for Use of Various Forms of Media*

Purpose	Radio	Television	Mobile Phone	Social Media	Totals
Education	154 (32%)	153 (32%)	78 (16%)	96 (20)	481 (40%)
Entertainment	66 (23%)	52 (18%)	101 (34%)	73 (25%)	292 (24%)
Both Education and Entertainment	71 (16%)	131(30%)	141 (33%)	92 (21%)	435 (36%)

The findings reveal that 40% of respondents used media primarily for educational purposes, while 29% reported using it mainly for entertainment. Further details indicate that radio and television were the most commonly used platforms for educational purposes (32% each), while mobile phones and social media were the preferred options for entertainment (34% and 25% respectively). On the other hand, parents who participated in the interviews sighted entertainment, specifically, communication with peers, and downloading music and movies.

The study found a clear divide in media usage among adolescents: social media and mobile phones were primarily used for entertainment, while radio and TV were favored for educational content. This trend is supported by Stockdale and Coyne (2020), who noted that platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram attract adolescents for entertainment due to their engaging and interactive nature. Haquq et al. (2019) similarly observed that mobile devices cater to adolescents' preference for personalized and recreational content.

Conversely, the use of radio and TV for education aligns with findings from Abbas et al. (2019), highlighting the importance of traditional media in educational programming, particularly in regions with limited internet access. Collins and Halverson (2018) also emphasized that TV remains a reliable source of educational content, trusted by parents and educators, despite the rise of digital media platforms.

However, this contrasts with findings from focus group discussions with teachers, which indicated that learners utilize media devices such as smartphones, computers, and radios primarily for academic purposes. This trend may be particularly relevant in school settings, where media use is often highly regulated and structured, allowing for focused educational engagement. In these environments, the restrictive nature of media access may lead students to adopt a more purposeful approach to media consumption, aligning their usage with academic goals. An example is the initiative by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development to introduce educational radio and television broadcasts, allowing students to engage with subjects included in the school curriculum (Weru, 2018).

#### 4.5 Miscellaneous Media Access Patterns

Of interest to the study were ecological factors that could potentially influence media accessibility, such as mobile phone ownership, which was hypothesized to afford greater access compared to borrowing. Moreover, internet



accessibility was posited to facilitate social media access. The presence of a television in a child's bedroom might also elevate usage rates in the absence of parental oversight. These investigations yielded the results indicated in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Miscellaneous Relevant Ecological Factor*

Pattern	Yes	No
Owned a personal mobile phone	40%	60%
Has easy access to the internet	38%	62%
Has a television in the bedroom	8%	92%
Television in the house is always on	34%	66%

The table presents various ecological factors associated with media access and usage. A considerable proportion of respondents reported owning personal mobile phones (40%) and having easy access to the internet (38%), while 34% indicated that television is frequently on in their households. Conversely, only a small percentage (8%) reported having a television in their bedroom. Additionally, the most popular media platforms identified by the respondents were WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok.

The study's findings provide valuable insights into media accessibility and usage patterns among adolescent Gen Z. Firstly, the fact that 40% of participants own personal mobile phones indicates a significant level of individual media access, which may enhance their control over media consumption compared to using shared or borrowed devices. Secondly, the finding that 34% of participants have their home televisions continuously on throughout the day suggests a significant presence of a pervasive background media.

#### 4.6 Qualitative Data Analysis and Findings

The study aimed to explore various aspects of media consumption among adolescent Generation Z learners in Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya Counties, Kenya. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews and focus group discussions, focusing on the types of media accessed, the duration of use, frequency of unsupervised access, and the primary reasons for media consumption. Through interviews with parents regarding the types of media accessed by adolescents, the findings are summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Parents' Responses on Frequently Accessed Form of Media*

Theme (Form of media)	Frequency of Mentions (N)	Percentage (%)
T1 (Radio)	37	27%
T2 (Television)	26	19%
T3 (Mobile Phone)	22	16%
T4 (Social Media)	39	28%
T5 (Other)	14	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100%</b>

Going by the number of mentions, social media was the most frequently accessed form of media, as highlighted by both parents. Parents identified social media as the leading media choice among adolescents, with 39 mentions, accounting for 28% of total responses. This preference was closely followed by radio, with 37 mentions (27%), and television, with 26 mentions (19%). Mobile phones were mentioned 22 times (16%), while other unspecified forms of media received only 14 mentions (10%). Parents further agreed that adolescents preferred social media for entertainment and social interactions, distinguishing it from the more educational roles of radio and television. This aligns with research by Stockdale and Coyne (2020), which notes that adolescents are drawn to social media for its interactive nature. In contrast, radio and TV are perceived as passive media primarily used for information dissemination.

From the focus group discussions, majority of teachers reported that students accessed social media daily, often utilizing cyber cafés due to limited personal mobile phone ownership. The restricted access to mobile phones was attributed to school rules that limit mobile device possession among adolescents. Interestingly, a distinction emerged in the teachers' perspective about media used for entertainment and that used for academic purposes. While social media and mobile phones dominated leisure activities, majority of teachers indicated that learners primarily utilized media devices like smartphones, computers, and radios for educational content. Teachers also emphasized that 75% of educational media consumption by students occurred under supervision, contrasting with the more independent and unsupervised use of social media platforms at home. For instance, one teacher remarked,



"While they are glued to their phones for social media, many students rely on radio programs for their studies, especially in subjects like mathematics and science."

(Quoted on 23rd October, 2023 in School X during a Focus Group Discussion)

This statement highlights that, while adolescents engage with social media for leisure, they rely on traditional media like radio for educational purposes, particularly in subjects such as mathematics and science. This reliance underscores the ongoing importance of traditional media in academic learning. It suggests that, despite the prevalence of digital platforms, structured educational content remains essential. Research by Abbas et al. (2019) supports this notion, indicating that radio and television continue to play a vital role in providing educational content, especially in developing areas where internet access may not be consistent. Furthermore, Collins and Halverson (2018) emphasize that traditional media forms are still perceived as credible sources for structured learning, reinforcing their significance in the educational landscape.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusions

The study explored various facets of media use among adolescent Gen Z learners in the three counties, and revealed a notable prevalence of social media within this demographic. A significant portion of media consumption occurs without parental supervision, particularly involving social media and mobile phones, which are frequently accessed in private settings. Additionally, the primary purposes of media consumption vary significantly; traditional media, such as radio and television, are predominantly used for educational purposes, while digital media, including mobile phones and social media, are mainly utilized for entertainment.

### 5.2 Recommendations

In light of these findings, the study recommends that educators leverage social media as a tool for enhancing teaching, guidance, and mentorship by providing access to educational resources through videos, podcasts, and articles. For instance, social media can be used for collaborative classroom activities, such as assignments, discussions, and feedback, while recognizing student achievements to motivate them academically. Furthermore, schools should promote normative education programs to teach online safety and ethical conduct, given the widespread use of social platforms among adolescents. There should extend to parents, by offering resources and training, such as workshops or online materials, to help parents effectively engage with and guide their children in navigating media. With an average daily media use of over six hours, schools and parents must establish appropriate media policies to ensure balanced time for physical activity, schoolwork, and interpersonal communication. Additionally, schools should work with content developers to create engaging educational material, such as games and videos for platforms like YouTube and TikTok, that align with adolescents' interests, embedding learning within the digital environments they frequently engage in.

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