

Influence of Social Media on Delinquent Behaviour among Students in Selected Public Secondary Schools in Bomet County, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of social media on delinquent behaviour among students in selected public secondary schools in Bomet County, Kenya. Delinquent behaviour in public secondary schools disrupts the learning environment and impacts students' well-being. In Bomet County, rising cases of delinquent behaviour such as drug use and violence have led to school unrest and property destruction. Despite efforts by school administration through guidance, counselling and disciplinary actions, the persistence of these behaviours suggests unresolved underlying issues. This study was anchored on Social Learning Theory. The research employed an ex post facto design with a target population of students, teachers, school counsellors, principals and deputy principals from selected public secondary schools in Bomet County, Kenya. A sample size of 382 was determined using the Yamane Formula. Stratified sampling was used, in which the study population was divided into distinct population categories. Data collection from the final respondents utilised both purposive and simple random sampling, using a structured questionnaire. The research tool was evaluated for both validity and reliability. The data was examined utilising both descriptive and inferential statistical methods using regression and correlation with the aid of SPSS version 26. Presentation of the study findings was done using tables and graphs. Results show that social media has a positive and statistically significant influence on delinquent behaviours ($\beta = 0.300, P < 0.000$). The study recommends that curricula include digital literacy and responsible media use, as these could help mitigate delinquent behaviour among the students.

Key terms: Adolescents, delinquent behaviour, Kenya, social learning theory, social media.

INTRODUCTION

Delinquent behaviour among secondary school students has become a persistent challenge in Kenya, with increasing cases of bullying, truancy, drug and substance abuse, school unrest, and other forms of indiscipline reported across public schools. Despite continued efforts by school administrations to curb this through guidance and counselling and value-based programs, instances of disruptive and risky behaviour among learners continue to escalate. According to Chepkirui and Kirimi (2025), student indiscipline and delinquent tendencies have intensified in recent years, contributing to frequent school unrest, declining academic performance, and increased safety concerns in learning institutions. This growing trend suggests that the underlying causes of delinquent behaviour among adolescents are not yet adequately addressed, making the issue a continuing concern for educators, parents, policymakers, and the broader society.

Delinquent behaviour refers to actions that violate societal norms, legal expectations, or moral standards, particularly among young people (Lewis & Salem, 2017). Such behaviours include aggression, truancy, drug use and bullying, which remain a major challenge globally and locally affecting students' psychological, academic and social development (Hirsch & Selvin, 2017; Ugwuzor, 2019). In school environments, delinquency disrupts discipline and academic progress, contributing to insecurity, strained relationships, and damaged school property.

Kenyan schools have increasingly reported rising cases of student indiscipline. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2014), thousands of juveniles were incarcerated between 2013 and 2014 due to involvement in criminal and delinquent acts. In Bomet County, incidents such as drug use, violent behaviour and school unrest are common and continue to threaten educational outcomes (Chepkirui & Kirimi, 2025). These issues point to deeper psychosocial determinants that require systematic investigation.

Social media has become a dominant environment where adolescents interact, learn and model attitudes and behaviours. This is well explained by Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1979), which posits that individuals learn behaviours through

observation, imitation and reinforcement. Bandura argues that when young people are repeatedly exposed to models which display aggression, substance use or defiance and when such behaviours appear rewarded or normalised, they are more likely to imitate them. Social media, therefore, creates an environment where delinquent behaviours can easily be learned, reinforced, and reproduced among impressionable adolescents.

Recent studies identify factors such as family structure, socioeconomic status, peer influence, and social media exposure as significant predictors of delinquent behaviour. Digital platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat and WhatsApp expose adolescents to violent content, cyberbullying, unhealthy peer interactions and deviant role models (Khan, 2022; Nuraieda, 2024). However, while digital exposure is rising rapidly in rural Kenya, its impact on students' behaviour remains understudied; thus, this study sought to examine the influence of social media on delinquent behaviour among students in selected public secondary schools in Bomet County, Kenya.

Delinquent behaviour in secondary schools has been a persistent problem, disrupting the learning environment and negatively affecting both academic outcomes and students' well-being. In Bomet County, public secondary schools have reported rising cases of student engagement in delinquent behaviour ranging from drug abuse to violent behaviour, which have led to school unrest and property destruction (Chepkirui & Kirimi, 2025). Despite the efforts by school administrators to address these issues through guidance, counselling and disciplinary action, the recurrence of delinquent behaviours suggests that there could be underlying causes which have not been adequately addressed. Existing literature points to several psychosocial factors that may influence students' engagement in delinquent behaviours, such as family structures, socioeconomic status, peer influence and social media. However, the effects of these factors and the extent to which they influence delinquent behaviours remain largely unexplored, particularly in rural settings such as Bomet County. This study seeks to fill this void by assessing how social media contributes to delinquent behaviour among students in selected public secondary schools in Bomet County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Influence of Social Media on Delinquent Behaviours among Students.

Although technology plays an important role in society, teenagers are exposed to various factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency as they actively participate in various online platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook and TikTok. On these platforms, teenagers are often exposed to harmful and inappropriate social media content which promotes negative behaviours such as drug use, cyberbullying, and other forms of delinquent behaviours (Khan, 2022).

Mambo and Nyamani (2023) conducted a study on the influence of mass media on deviant behaviour among bachelor-level students. The research utilised a descriptive survey methodology with its population targeting 16,421 University students in Nairobi County. The study reported that music lyrics contributed to violence and aggressive behaviours among young adults. They further reported that television characters display aggressive lifestyles that encourage deviant behaviour. Despite the study providing valuable insights into how social media influences delinquency, it did not delve into the influence of social media among secondary school students, a gap that was relevant to the current study. However, their study focused on young adults in higher learning institutions and overlooked secondary school populations and the gaps in multi-stakeholder perspectives addressed in the current study.

Similarly, Adhiambo et al. (2024) analysed the relationship between exposure to violent content on social media and aggressive behaviours among adolescent learners in the Western Region, Kenya. The study utilised descriptive survey and correlational research designs. The study targeted 190,555 students in Kakamega, Kisii and Siaya counties. The study found a significant correlation between aggressive behaviours and exposure to violent content on television. Television was identified as the most common contributor associated with aggression. The study reported that adolescents are constantly exposed to media violence and imitate violent behaviours through mobile phones. The study focused on television, neglecting other platforms such as

Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram. The study also lacks a multi-stakeholder perspective, which limits its applicability. The current study addressed this gap by incorporating other stakeholders like teachers, school counsellors and principals who may provide additional insights into how social media influences delinquency.

Indainanto and Purba (2024) reviewed literature on the influence of social media on bullying behaviours among adolescents. The study examined the influence of social media on bullying behaviours among adolescents, conducted using academic databases such as Google Scholar. The study selected 37 articles on social media, bullying and cyberbullying published in the last five years. The study reported that social media use significantly increases the risk of cyberbullying among adolescents. The study further reported that the influence of cyberbullying among adolescents is significant, encompassing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, feelings of social isolation, and a decline in academic performance. Reliance on secondary data limits the study's applicability, for Bomet County, integrating primary data from students, teachers, school counsellors, and principals provided a broader scope on the influence of social media on delinquent behaviours among students.

Asanga et al. (2023) conducted a similar study on how social media influences the academic performance of senior school students in Uyo, Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of social media on academic performance among senior school students in Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was employed to guide the research study. A sample of 200 students from four senior schools was selected using a simple random technique. The findings revealed that a large percentage of students are addicted to social media, with no significant difference in usage between boys and girls. The findings further established that there is a notable connection between social media and the academic performance of students. The study's focus was on academic performance and not the broader scope of delinquent behaviours such as substance abuse, truancy and violence, which are associated with social media. The study was conducted in an urban setting, leaving a contextual gap in understanding

how social media influences delinquency in diverse contexts such as Bomet County, Kenya.

Kasim and Ismail (2023) conducted a similar study on the influence of social media use on spelling skills among pupils in rural primary schools in Sarawak, Malaysia. The purpose of the study was to determine pupils' social media use in rural primary schools in Malaysia. A survey research design was utilised in data collection through a questionnaire. The findings reported that the most used social media platforms were Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube. The study further revealed that social media is one of the best ways to practice English, especially in writing. Moreover, the findings revealed that 60%-80% of the respondents preferred using English on social media as it makes them feel comfortable. Although the study provided valuable insights significant to social media, the study largely focuses on social media use and spelling skills, excluding other factors such as exposure to harmful content and cyberbullying, online interaction effects and how they influence delinquent behaviours. The study focused on rural primary schools as opposed to proposed public secondary schools in Bomet County, Kenya, highlighting a contextual gap that the current study sought to fill.

Across studies, a common theme emerges: social media significantly shapes adolescent behaviour through exposure to role models, peer interactions, and user-generated content. Although some studies highlight educational benefits, the majority emphasise risks such as cyberbullying, imitation of violent behaviour, and normalisation of deviant conduct. However, existing studies often focus on urban settings, university populations, or single platforms. Few studies provide a multi-stakeholder, rural Kenyan perspective, highlighting a notable gap that this study addresses.

Theoretical Review

Social Learning Theory

Bandura (1979), the proponent of this theory, suggests that individuals can learn through vicarious reinforcement, which occurs in four stages: observation, retention, reproduction, and motivation. The process begins with the learner paying attention to the characteristics of a model. The learner observes the model's behaviour, retains the observed behaviour and practices it to enhance proficiency. Over time, a

motivating force satisfies the learner's needs and desires, encouraging continued imitation of the behaviour. With repeated practice, the behaviour becomes habitual.

According to Bandura (1979), observational learning can take place within a child's immediate environment or in broader social settings. Social Learning Theory (SLT) posits that an individual's behaviour is shaped by both environmental factors and personal traits. Bandura emphasises that community organisations and social institutions serve as critical sources of information for children. An environment that fosters undesirable behaviour increases the likelihood of an individual engaging in delinquent acts. Juveniles observe and imitate behaviours they encounter in social settings. When these settings, such as family environments, educational institutions, or neighbourhoods, include members exhibiting unwanted behaviours, juveniles are more likely to adopt similar behaviours. These imitated actions are reinforced as juveniles find motivation in what they observe, practising the behaviour repeatedly until it becomes habitual. Social media is also central to Social Learning Theory. Social media reinforces delinquent behaviours by providing a platform for observing and mimicking both positive and negative role models. When students frequently consume content that glorifies violence, drug use, or rebellion, especially when such behaviour is celebrated online, they are more likely to imitate these actions, particularly in the absence of counterbalancing influences like supportive family or community structures.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted an ex post facto research design, appropriate for analysing relationships among variables without manipulating them (Creswell & Cresswell, 2018). The target population comprised students, teachers, school counsellors, principals, and deputy principals from public secondary schools in Bomet County. A sample of 382 respondents was determined using the Yamane formula. Stratified sampling ensured adequate representation of different respondent categories, while purposive and simple random sampling were used to select the final participants.

Data was gathered through the use of structured questionnaires and examined with descriptive statistics and simple linear regression utilising SPSS version 26. The reliability of the questionnaires was evaluated by the use of Cronbach's Alpha to assess internal consistency. The study achieved an overall Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.742, which was acceptable. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in data collection. Inferential analysis was conducted through linear regression with the assistance of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. The following simple regression model was employed:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$$

Where;

Y = Delinquent Behaviour

β_0 = Intercept

β_1 = Beta Coefficient

X_1 = Social Media

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analysis was conducted to establish the extent to which social media determinants influence delinquent behaviour among students in selected public secondary schools in Bomet County. This involved calculating means and standard deviations from responses collected using a Likert Scale of 1 to 5, and the results were presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Social Media

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social media content influences daily behaviour choices	278	3.00	4.00	3.8201	.38476
Social media promotes materialistic attitudes and consumer behaviour	278	2.00	5.00	3.4532	.88079
Online communities shape opinions and behaviour choices	278	3.00	4.00	3.7122	.45354
Online interaction systems contribute to social behaviour	278	2.00	5.00	3.8094	.62700
Social media makes it easier for one to engage in cyberbullying or harassment.	278	3.00	5.00	3.9209	.38123
Valid N	278				

Source: Research Data (2025)

The findings revealed that among students in public secondary schools in Bomet County, the data reveal a strong perception that social media content influences daily behaviour choices, with 237 (85.3%) agreeing and 41 (14.7%) disagreeing. The mean score of 3.82 and a low standard deviation of 0.385 reflect consistent agreement, indicating that students often model their daily behaviours, including potentially delinquent acts, on what they consume through social media platforms.

Regarding the statement that social media promotes materialistic attitudes and consumer behaviour, 199 (71.6%) of the students agreed, while 79 (28.4%) did

not. The mean score of 3.45 is the lowest among the items, and the standard deviation of 0.881 is the highest, indicating greater variation in responses. While most students recognise the role of social media in shaping materialistic tendencies, which may contribute to deviant behaviour, opinions differ significantly across the group.

On the statement on whether online communities shape opinions and behaviour choices, 228 (82.0%) agreed, while 50 (18.0%) disagreed. The mean score of 3.71 and standard deviation of 0.454 suggest a strong and consistent perception that virtual peer groups and

influencers affect students' thinking and conduct, potentially influencing rule-breaking behaviour.

Response to the statement online interaction systems contribute to social behaviour, 233 (83.8%) of respondents agreed, while 45 (16.2%) did not. The mean score of 3.81 and standard deviation of 0.627 points to a general consensus that platforms like chats, comment sections, and online gaming communities shape how students interact socially, often beyond school supervision, which can foster or normalise delinquent conduct.

The belief that social media makes it easier for one to engage in cyberbullying or harassment was affirmed by 241 (86.7%) of the students, with only 37 (13.3%) disagreeing. The mean of 3.92, the highest among the items, and a very low standard deviation of 0.381, indicate strong and uniform agreement, hence consistent with findings by Indainanto and Purba (2024), who reported that engaging with social media

significantly elevates the risk of cyberbullying among adolescents. This suggests that respondents are highly aware of the dark side of online anonymity and its role in facilitating harmful behaviours like bullying, an increasingly common form of digital delinquency.

Inferential Statistics

A linear regression model was utilised to assess the influence of social media on delinquent behaviour among students in selected public secondary schools in Bomet County, Kenya. The regression findings were presented through a model summary and coefficient tables. This approach was applied to test the research hypothesis and address the study's key objective.

The hypothesis for the study was tested as follows; Ho: Social media has no statistically significant influence on delinquent behaviours among students in selected public secondary schools in Bomet County, Kenya.

Table 2: Coefficients for the Influence of Social Media on Delinquent Behaviour Coefficients

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.431	.265		12.935	.000
	Social media	.300	.068	.323	4.392	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Delinquent Behaviour

Source: Research Data (2025)

The regression coefficients in Table 2 show how social media relates to delinquent behaviour as indicated.

$$\text{Delinquent Behaviour (DB)} = 3.431 + 0.300\text{SMs.}$$

The analysis shows that social media has a positive and statistically significant relationship with delinquent behaviour, with a coefficient ($\beta = 0.300$, $P < 0.000$). Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This confirms that social media significantly contributes to the increase in delinquent behaviour among students in Bomet County secondary schools. The study findings align with those of Adhiambo (2024) in the Western Region, Kenya, who found a significant correlation between aggressive behaviours and exposure to violent content on television. The results also corroborate the findings of Indainanto and

Purba (2024) that reported a significant positive influence of social media on bullying behaviour among adolescents.

Summary

The findings show that there exists a positive and significant influence of social media on delinquent behaviour. Respondents in Bomet County's public secondary schools strongly believe that social media has a big influence on conduct. The majority of students concurred that the material they are exposed to online influences their everyday conduct, including possible delinquent behaviour. Although opinions on this were more divided, social media was also perceived to encourage materialistic tendencies. Numerous respondents held the view that attitudes and actions are influenced by online communities,

underscoring the significance of virtual peer networks on behaviour. Students' social behaviour was also seen to be significantly influenced by social contact on digital platforms such as chat rooms and games, which are frequently unsupervised by adults. Furthermore, there was broad agreement that social media contributes to cyberbullying, confirming its function as a psychosocial factor influencing delinquency.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions: The results reveal that social media has a positive and statistically significant relationship with delinquent behaviour, indicating that increased exposure to social media contributes to higher levels of misconduct among students. This suggests that the content consumed online, including potentially harmful or violent material, plays a key role in shaping negative behavioural outcomes.

Recommendations: The study recommended that curricula include digital literacy and responsible media use. Students should be taught about the possible dangers of social media, such as consumerism, exposure to bad content, and cyberbullying. To encourage candid conversations regarding internet use, parents and educators should receive training on how to keep an eye on and supervise their children's online activity. Additionally, schools must set up secure channels for reporting dangerous internet interactions, including cyberbullying. Peer-led campaigns and activities that encourage positive online conduct can aid in changing social media's perception as a risk factor to one that encourages constructive interaction and personal development. The study further recommends that other psychosocial determinants should be investigated since the current study focused on social media effects on delinquent behaviour.

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