

Influence of Social Media on Career Choice Among Students in Public Day Secondary Schools in Kiambaa Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of social media on career choice among students in public day secondary schools in Kiambaa Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya. The study was anchored on the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, in which a cross-sectional survey provided the quantitative strand and semi-structured interviews provided the qualitative strand. The target population comprised 5,000 students, 30 guidance and counseling teachers, and 15 principals drawn from a census of all 15 public day secondary schools in the sub-county. Yamane's formula was applied to the student population to obtain a sample of 370 students, who were selected through proportionate stratified random sampling, while all 30 guidance and counselling teachers and all 15 principals were purposively included. A total of 297 students (80.3%), 23 teachers (76.7%), and 12 principals (80.0%) responded, giving an overall response rate of 80.0%. We collected data using a structured questionnaire and interview guides. We established content and face validity through expert review and assessed reliability through a pilot study, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.822 for the social media variable and an overall instrument reliability of .849. Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS version 29 using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation and linear regression, while qualitative data were analysed thematically and integrated with the quantitative results through joint displays. The findings revealed a positive, statistically significant relationship between social media and career choice among students in public day secondary schools in Kiambaa Sub-County ($r = .476$, $p < .001$), with social media independently accounting for 22.7% of the variance in students' career choice. The study concluded that social media is a substantial and increasingly influential factor in students' career decision-making, exerting a double-edged effect that broadens career awareness and, without adequate guidance, risks fostering unrealistic career expectations. The study recommends that schools formally integrate social media literacy into career guidance programmes to help students critically evaluate online career content, that career guidance and counselling teachers actively engage with the platforms students already use to contextualise online career portrayals, and that government agencies and professional bodies leverage social media to disseminate accurate and diverse career information, thereby countering the disproportionate visibility of a narrow set of highly publicised careers.

Keywords: *Social Factors, social media, Career Choice, Secondary school students, Career guidance, Social Cognitive Career Theory, Kiambaa Sub-County*

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1. Introduction

Career choice is widely recognised as a critical developmental milestone shaping an individual's professional trajectory and life satisfaction. Career development theories present it not as a single event but as a process shaped by psychological, social, and contextual factors (Super, 1990; Lent et al., 1994). Of these, the social environment surrounding the learner has attracted particular attention, because the people, institutions, and platforms a student interacts with determine the career information, encouragement, and opportunities to which that student is exposed (Bandura, 1997). Traditionally, this environment has been understood through three channels: family, which supplies financial capacity, expectations, and role models; peers, who provide a reference group against which students compare aspirations; and the school, which supplies career guidance, information, and exposure (Ginevra et al., 2018). Increasingly, however, a fourth channel has emerged alongside these: social media, which has rapidly become a major, largely unstructured source of occupational imagery, role models, and career information for adolescents, yet remains comparatively under-examined relative to the other three.

Globally, the influence of digital platforms on career aspiration is becoming difficult to separate from broader socio-economic and labour-market trends. In Europe, growing uncertainty brought about by digitalisation and automation is forcing students to balance personal interest with perceived employability, even as family guidance and access to higher education remain influential (Németh, 2020; European Commission, 2022). In Asia, the rise of digital economies has expanded student interest in non-traditional fields such as information technology and creative industries, alongside enduring parental and societal pressure toward prestige careers (Chong & Ma, 2022; Wang & Li, 2021). In Africa, education systems that place limited emphasis on formal career counselling leave students comparatively more dependent on informal sources, including peer networks and, increasingly, social media, to navigate career decisions in the absence of adequate school-based guidance (Salami, 2010; Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). Across these contexts, the common thread is that as structured guidance systems remain uneven, students turn to informal and digital sources to fill the gap, making the influence of platforms such as social media an increasingly urgent, if under-examined, empirical question.

Kenyan evidence follows a similar pattern. Vocational preferences remain heavily shaped by parental guidance, household finances, and local labour-market perceptions (Mghanga et al., 2019), while the Competency-Based Curriculum's attempt to organise learning around career pathways has not resolved persistent gaps in access to career guidance services (Republic of Kenya, 2019). At the same time, the rapid expansion of digital platform access among Kenyan students is introducing social media as a further, and increasingly prominent, source of occupational information and aspiration (Omondi, 2023), even as most national and county-level research has continued to focus on family and school-based determinants rather than on this newer digital channel.

This pattern holds in Kiambu County specifically. Njoroge, Kinyua, and Kamande (2025) found that parents' education level significantly influenced students' career decision-making self-efficacy, while Mburu, Biwott, and Macharia (2026) found that parents' occupation

significantly shaped students' choice of vocational courses. School-based determinants have received similar attention: Nderitu, Mukadi, and Tarus-Kiptoo (2024) found that career teachers' perceptions significantly influenced students' career decision-making self-efficacy, and Kiburi, Kimani, and Rop (2024) established that access to career information, drawn from sources including television, radio, print media, the internet, and mobile phones, positively predicted career adaptability. Sub-county-specific evidence reinforces this picture: in Githunguri, Nduhi (2016) found that restrictive school subject policies constrained students' career autonomy despite high awareness of guidance services, while in Kiambu West, Gitonga (2013) found substantial career uncertainty linked to teacher unpreparedness and a complete absence of information technology integration in career guidance. In Kikuyu Sub-County, Wang'ombe (2021) documented active parental participation in school-based career guidance activities.

Collectively, this Kiambu-specific evidence converges heavily on family influence and formal school-based guidance as the dominant explanatory factors, while social media, despite the county's documented expansion in digital platform access, has received markedly less empirical attention as an independent predictor. What remains unclear is the extent to which social media, operating as an increasingly pervasive and largely unmonitored channel of occupational information, independently shapes career choice among students who move daily between home, school, and an expanding online environment. This gap is particularly pressing in Kiambaa Sub-County, where no study located by the researcher has statistically examined the relationship between social media and career choice among students in public day secondary schools. This study therefore examined the influence of social media on career choice among students in public day secondary schools in Kiambaa Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya.

1.1 Problem Statement

Students are expected to leave secondary school with a career direction informed by adequate exposure, reliable guidance, and a supportive social environment. UNESCO (2023) and the ILO (2022) report that school-based guidance, family involvement, and peer support measurably improve adolescents' career decision-making capacity, and Kenyan studies concur that parental support, peer influence, and structured school guidance are central to informed career decisions (Nderitu et al., 2024; Arara, 2024). Increasingly, however, adolescents' career-related exposure no longer occurs solely through family, school, and peers; social media has become a pervasive, largely unmonitored source of career information, role models, and occupational portrayals for secondary school students, yet its influence remains comparatively under-examined in the Kenyan literature relative to these more traditional factors.

Evidence from Kiambu County indicates that students are not leaving secondary school with adequate career direction. Gitonga (2013) found that 64% of secondary school students in Kiambu West District were uncertain about their career choices, that 87% of teachers were insufficiently prepared to implement career guidance programmes, and that none of the schools studied had integrated information technology, including digital and social media platforms, into career guidance. In Githunguri, Nduhi (2016) found that although 88.3% of students were aware of career guidance services, 74.3% reported that school policy imposed elective subjects, with little attention paid to the informal, digitally mediated influences students encountered outside school. More recently, Njoroge et al. (2025) and Mburu et al. (2026) established that parental education and occupation significantly influenced career decision-making self-efficacy and vocational course choice, respectively, among students in public secondary

schools in Kiambu County, while Nderitu et al. (2024) and Kiburi et al. (2024) demonstrated that career teachers' practices and access to career information significantly influenced career decision-making self-efficacy and adaptability in the same county. None of these studies, however, examined social media as a distinct predictor of career choice. Within Kiambaa Sub-County specifically, the Ministry of Education (2020) reported that many students complete secondary education without a clear career direction or accurate knowledge of labour-market demands, in a context where student social media use is widespread and largely unstructured.

What is known, therefore, is that career choice among secondary school students in Kiambu County is associated with parental education and occupation, and with the adequacy of school-based career guidance and access to career information. What remains unclear is the extent to which social media, as an increasingly dominant source of occupational information and role models, independently predicts career choice among these students, and whether its influence is comparable in magnitude to that of these more established factors. Existing Kiambu studies have concentrated on family, teacher, and school-based predictors, conducted county-wide or in Githunguri, Kikuyu, and Kiambu West, with no study located by the researcher statistically quantifying social media's relationship with career choice among students in public day secondary schools in Kiambaa Sub-County specifically.

In the absence of such localised, quantified evidence, schools and county education authorities in Kiambaa have limited basis on which to determine whether social media warrants deliberate incorporation into career guidance practice, or whether its influence can safely be left unaddressed. This study therefore examined the influence of social media on career choice among students in public day secondary schools in Kiambaa Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya, to establish the strength and significance of this relationship in a context where digital exposure is close but empirical attention remains limited.

1.2 Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: Social media does not statistically significantly predict career choice among students in public day secondary schools in Kiambaa Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study was anchored on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) as an extension of Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory. SCCT served as the study's sole anchoring theory, supplying the logic for selecting the four independent variables, framing the conceptual framework, and interpreting the findings. The theory holds that career development results from the dynamic interplay of personal attributes, environmental conditions, and overt behaviours, centring on three person-level constructs: self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals, which are shaped by contextual supports and barriers such as socio-economic status and access to education (Lent et al., 1994; Lent et al., 2000). A key strength of SCCT is its holistic integration of cognitive-personal and contextual variables, which is empirically supported and adaptable across diverse populations (Nauta, 2010b; Lent et al., 2002). However, critics have noted that the theory does not clearly specify how contextual barriers are overcome and relies on self-report measures susceptible to social desirability bias (Swanson & Gore, 2000; Betz & Hackett, 2006).

The present study drew specifically on SCCT's contextual supports and barriers component rather than its person-level constructs. Family-related factors, peer support, school resources, and social media were selected because SCCT identifies the learner's surrounding environment as the source of the learning experiences and opportunity structures within which career decisions form: family factors operate through financial capacity, expectations, and role models; peer support through social learning and encouragement; school resources through institutional guidance and mentorship; and social media through exposure to occupational role models. It is acknowledged that SCCT's core constructs, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals, were not directly measured; SCCT is therefore used to explain why these environmental supports and barriers would be expected to relate to career choice, not to claim that its mediating cognitive mechanisms were empirically demonstrated.

Holland's Theory of Career Choice (RIASEC) and Super's Developmental Theory were reviewed as supporting, non-anchoring theories offering complementary perspectives. Holland's theory (Holland, 1997) classifies individuals and work environments into six personality types and proposes that career satisfaction arises from person-environment congruence (Nauta, 2010a). Its distinct contribution is the person-environment fit perspective, complementing SCCT's explanation of how environments shape the confidence with which interests are pursued; however, Holland's model does not itself explain how contextual factors such as family, peer, school, and social media influence interest development in the first place, a mechanism supplied by SCCT rather than Holland's theory (Tracey & Robbins, 2006). This study did not measure Holland's constructs.

Super's Developmental Theory (Super, 1990; Super et al., 1996) frames career choice as a lifelong process unfolding across developmental stages, shaped by an evolving self-concept and societal factors including family background and education. Its distinct contribution is developmental, justifying the inclusion of Form 1 to Form 4 students as representing different points along the exploration stage, and complementing SCCT's account of the contextual supports and barriers operating at any given developmental point. Super's self-concept construct was likewise not measured. Combined, these three theories position SCCT as the explanatory anchor while Holland's and Super's theories contextualise, without displacing, its central role in the study's design and interpretation

2.2 Empirical Review

Wong, Shahali, Chan, and Halim (2022) investigated the role of social media in predicting students' STEM career choices. Students' career choices are influenced by personal and contextual factors. However, studies on social media's effect on STEM careers remain limited. A survey was conducted on 330 secondary school students aged 13-17. The results showed that social media use in science learning and students' interest are moderated. It was also found that changes in social media use in science lessons may lead to similar changes in affinity toward STEM careers. This study provides evidence that social media use can significantly affect students' affinity toward STEM careers. Thus, efforts to increase teachers' skills in conducting educational activities that use social platforms are necessary. Hence, teachers would be convinced of the effectiveness of using online social networking applications in STEM learning. This study focused specifically on STEM career affinity rather than general career choice and did not integrate family, peer, or school resource factors; the current study addressed this gap by examining social media's influence on general career choice alongside three other social factors in Kiambaa Sub-County.

Nguyen (2024) explored the role of social media on the career choices of Asian American students, particularly those opting for non-STEM fields, drawing on qualitative data from a sample of 12 participants. The findings showed that social media influenced career development both positively and negatively. Positive influences included exposure to diverse career possibilities, fostering community connections and support, and providing role models and inspirational content. Conversely, social media could also distort career choices by presenting unrealistic portrayals of different fields. The study also noted neutral influences, such as personal decision-making and the sense of belonging social media can facilitate. The study underscored how social media can enhance self-efficacy and outcome expectations, while also highlighting contextual supports and barriers. A limitation of this study is its small sample size; therefore, a larger sample is needed to provide a more comprehensive view of social media's influence on career choice. This study relied on a small qualitative sample of Asian American students, limiting generalizability, and did not integrate family, peer, or school resource factors; the current study addressed this gap by using a larger, quantitatively representative sample of Kenyan secondary school students and examining social media alongside three other social factors.

Another study by Efunwole and Sijuwade (2023) investigated the influence of social media usage on students' career choices at Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo. It also discussed the implications for instructional media design/production, communication, and school guidance and counseling. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. One hundred and fifty (150) questionnaires (37 online and 113 manual) of sixteen (16) items were used to collect data from students across the nine (9) faculties in the citadel of learning. Data were analyzed using SPSS App / Percentages. Findings revealed that students attributed more efficacy to social media for their studies (75.9%) than for fun (24.1%). It also revealed that students reported social media as the major influence on their chosen career (67.2%), while 32.8% disagreed. The study therefore concluded that the irresistible use of social media among students (youth) has significantly contributed to their academic development. This study's gap is that it was conducted among university students, whereas the current study focuses on secondary school students, specifically those intending to pursue further education. As the authors note, this population gap (university versus secondary school students) is directly addressed by the current study, which also extends the analysis by integrating family, peer, and school resource factors alongside social media.

A study by Adzovie, Namale, Ntaah, Gbedenyo et al. (2025) explored the extent to which peers and social media influence students' career choices and aspirations in senior high schools in Ghana. The study adopted a survey design and used simple random sampling to select the sample from the population. The sample consisted of Form 3 students from the selected senior high schools in the Kumasi Metropolis of the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The researchers used a 24-item questionnaire divided into 3 sections as the data collection instrument. The researchers developed the questionnaire. The researchers analyzed the data using moderation analysis. The results showed that both peers and social media significantly influenced senior high school students' career choices and aspirations. This study, conducted in Ghana, jointly examined peer and social media influence but did not include family factors or school resources; the current study extends this integrative approach by examining all four social factors together among students in Kiambaa Sub-County, Kenya.

In Kenya, Njogu, Kibaara, and Gichohi (2019) examined the impact of mass media on the career choices of students in public secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya. A descriptive survey design was used. Through stratified, systematic, and purposive sampling, 460 participants comprising 377 Form Four students, 36 principals, 36 career guidance teachers, and 11 Form Four parents' representatives were selected from 364 schools, respectively. Results showed that media personalities and celebrities, mobile phones, the internet, and television influenced secondary school students' career paths to a great extent. The study concluded that mass media and the career choices of public secondary school students in Meru County were positively and statistically significantly related. This study was conducted in Meru County and examined mass media broadly (mobile phones, internet, and television) rather than social media specifically, without integrating family, peer, or school resource factors; the current study addressed this geographic and conceptual gap by focusing on social media specifically alongside three other social factors in Kiambaa Sub-County.

2.3 Research Gaps

The reviewed social media studies differ markedly in scope and method, from Wong et al.'s (2022) quantitative survey of STEM affinity among Malaysian students, to Nguyen's (2024) small qualitative study of Asian American students, to Efunwole and Sijuwade's (2023) descriptive survey of Nigerian university students. Despite this variation, all three converge on social media having both a positive influence, through exposure to career information and role models, and a potentially distorting influence, through unrealistic portrayals, a duality that anticipated the double-edged finding. The studies also share a limitation: none examined social media alongside family, peer, and school factors within a single model, and none was conducted among secondary school students in Kenya. The present study addressed this gap by measuring social media's relationship with career choice jointly with three other predictors among public day secondary school students in Kiambaa Sub-County.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed methods design, in which quantitative data were collected via a cross-sectional student survey and qualitative data via semi-structured interviews with career guidance and counselling teachers and principals during the same period; the two strands were analysed independently and then merged during interpretation to triangulate findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023). The design allowed the study to establish statistical relationships between social media and career choice, while also explaining the contextual mechanisms underlying this relationship.

The study was conducted in Kiambaa Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya, a peri-urban area bordering Nairobi that combines agricultural and informal-settlement land use and exposes students to urban labour-market information and social media to a greater extent than more rural sub-counties. The target population comprised approximately 5,000 students, 30 career guidance and counselling teachers, and 15 principals across all 15 public day secondary schools in the sub-county (total population = 5,045). The study conducted a census of all 15 schools. The student sample size ($n = 370$) was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula and allocated proportionately across schools using a multi-stage stratified random sampling procedure (by ward, school gender composition, form, and gender). We purposively targeted all 30 teachers and 15 principals as a census, given their direct involvement in career guidance; 23 teachers (76.7%) and 12 principals (80.0%) ultimately participated.

We collected quantitative data using structured, 5-point Likert-scale questionnaires covering background information, the four predictor constructs, and career choice. The study collected qualitative data using semi-structured interview guides for teachers and principals. Two university supervisors established content and face validity through expert review. A pilot test with 37 students from schools outside the study area assessed instrument clarity and reliability, targeting a Cronbach's alpha of $\geq .70$; reliability was subsequently computed separately for each construct. Qualitative trustworthiness was addressed using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, through triangulation, member checking, thick description, an external audit, and a reflexive journal.

Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS version 29 using descriptive statistics (means, percentages, standard deviations) and inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation and linear regression. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, open coding, axial coding, and theme generation, until saturation was reached. The two strands were integrated through joint displays linking the objective's quantitative findings to their corresponding qualitative themes, with explicit statements of convergence or divergence.

Ethical approval was obtained from the university and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), with additional permits from the county education office. Informed consent (with parental consent and student assent) was secured from all participants, anonymity was maintained through pseudonyms and secure data storage, and data will be retained for five years before secure disposal, in line with university policy.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

There were three categories of respondents in this study: students, career guidance and counselling teachers, and school principals. Of the 370 students sampled, 297 returned duly completed questionnaires, a response rate of 80.3%. Of the 30 career guidance and counselling teachers targeted, 23 were interviewed, a response rate of 76.7%. Of the 15 principals targeted, 12 were interviewed, a response rate of 80.0%. Across all three categories, 332 respondents participated out of a target of 415, for an overall response rate of 80.0%.

4.2 Reliability Results

Prior to the main data collection exercise, a pilot test was conducted with 37 students, representing approximately 10% of the target sample size, drawn from two public day secondary schools in Kikuyu Constituency, Kiambu County, that were not part of the main study. The pilot tested the clarity, reliability, and appropriateness of the research instruments. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed to assess internal consistency reliability, with a threshold of 0.7 considered acceptable, in line with Taber (2018) and Tavakol and Dennick (2011). The tests yielded an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.894; therefore, the data collection instrument was reliable.

4.3 Descriptive Analysis

The study sought to establish the influence of social media on career choice among students in public day secondary schools in Kiambaa Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya. To answer this research question, the students were asked several questions on the same topic. For the quantitative descriptive statistics, a 5-point Likert scale was also adopted with the following

key: 1-Strongly Disagree (SD), 2-Disagree (D), 3-Undecided (UD), 4-Agree (A), 5-Strongly Agree (SA), μ -Mean score, σ -Standard Deviation.

Table 1: Descriptive Results for Social Media Influence

Statements	SD	D	UD	A	SA	μ	σ
Social media provides me with information about different careers.	15.2	7.7	18.5	44.1	14.5	3.35	1.260
Professionals or influencers on social media inspire my career aspirations.	18.9	20.9	22.2	24.2	13.8	2.93	1.326
I learn about career opportunities through discussions with peers on social media.	15.2	22.5	24.2	32.0	6.1	2.91	1.179
Careers portrayed positively on social media affect how I value certain professions.	10.8	9.1	18.8	42.4	18.9	3.49	1.208
Average Score	3.17 1.243						

As presented in Table 1, the construct recorded an overall average score of 3.17 ($\sigma = 1.243$), indicating a moderate-to-strong influence of social media on students' career decisions. On the statement “Social media provides me with information about different careers”, a majority of 58.6% agreed or strongly agreed, against 22.9% who disagreed ($\mu = 3.35$, $\sigma = 1.260$), the second-highest mean in the construct, underscoring the informational role that social media platforms play for students navigating career decisions. This finding is consistent with Nguyen (2024), who found that social media exposed students to diverse career possibilities and provided access to role models and inspirational content.

On “Professionals or influencers on social media inspire my career aspirations”, responses were more evenly distributed, with 38.0% agreeing or strongly agreeing against 39.8% who disagreed ($\mu = 2.93$, $\sigma = 1.326$), the lowest mean in the construct, suggesting that while social media provides information, direct inspirational influence from online personalities is less universally felt. A comparable pattern emerged for “I learn about career opportunities through discussions with peers on social media” (38.1% agree/strongly agree versus 37.7% disagree; $\mu = 2.91$, $\sigma = 1.179$), pointing to a hybrid peer-media pathway of influence that students neither uniformly embrace nor reject. By contrast, the statement “Careers portrayed positively on social media affect how I value certain professions” recorded the highest mean in the construct ($\mu = 3.49$, $\sigma = 1.208$), with 61.3% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This suggests that social media's strongest effect on students in Kiambaa Sub-County lies less in directly inspiring a specific career choice and more in shaping the perceived value, status, and desirability of different professions, a distinction consistent with Wong et al. (2022), who found that changes in social media use were associated with equivalent changes in students' affinity toward particular careers, and with Adzovie et al. (2025), who reported a significant influence of social media on the career choices and aspirations of senior high school students in Ghana.

The qualitative data from principals and career guidance and counselling teachers reinforced and extended this quantitative picture, converging strongly on the view that social media exerts both a broadening and a potentially distorting influence on students' career perceptions. One principal observed that “some career paths have become more common and highly chosen because of the people they follow on the social platforms. For instance, music, film, content creation, creative arts and modelling are more likely to have a good enrolment unlike the traditional careers like medicine, education, engineering.” Another principal linked social media exposure directly to entrepreneurial aspiration, noting that it “does especially encourage students to go for careers that lead to self-employment,” while a third principal cautioned more critically that “social media has become a way of life; it greatly influences students by encouraging them to copy the characters they follow.”

Career guidance and counselling teachers offered a similarly two-sided assessment, most frequently framing social media as “both helpful and misleading” rather than uniformly positive or negative. One teacher explained that social media “has been largely helpful; however, there have been a few cases where some students developed the wrong impression about the careers they wished to pursue, leading to unrealistic expectations or misconceptions,” while another summarised the duality succinctly using two contrasting lists: “Positive: 1. Identification of new niches in the market 2. Ability to access mentors. Negative: 1. Misinformation 2. Unrealistic expectations.”

Several teachers pointed to specific social media personalities as tangible drivers of aspiration, with one noting that “there are students who look up to figures like Ann Mwangangi the mortician, who have made young people overcome the fear of dead bodies. They too want to be morticians in the future,” while another cautioned that “majority of learners associate with socialites and want to take careers like dancing, fashion and singing,” and that some students believe “the music industry is the best...all want that pathway, all want to be celebs.” Taken together, the qualitative accounts corroborate the quantitative finding that social media's dominant effect is on how professions are perceived and valued rather than on directly determining a student's final choice, while also surfacing a genuine risk of unrealistic expectations that several teachers felt required active mitigation through structured career guidance.

4.4 Inferential Analysis

The study employed inferential analysis to examine the relationship between social media influence and career choice among students in public day secondary schools in Kiambaa Sub-County. To determine the relationship, the study applied linear regression analysis, guided by the null research hypothesis. Thus, the study tested the following research hypothesis: there is no significant relationship between social media influence and career choice among students in public day secondary schools in Kiambaa Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya. The results are presented using the correlation, Model Summary, ANOVA, and coefficients.

Table 2: Correlation Results for the Relationship between Social Media and Career Choice

		Social Media	Career Choices
Social Media	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Career Choices	Pearson Correlation	.476**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	297	297

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a positive, moderate-to-strong relationship between social media and career choices ($r = .476$, $p = .000$, $N = 297$). Because the p-value is below the 0.01 significance level, the correlation is statistically significant, indicating that this relationship is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance. The positive sign of the coefficient shows that as students' exposure to and engagement with social media increases, their career choice tendencies (as measured in this study) tend to increase correspondingly. This finding aligns with the broader pattern in the literature (Adzovie et al., 2025), which found that social media exposes students to diverse career role models, information, and online trends, while also risking idealized or unrealistic portrayals of certain careers.

Table 3: Model Summary Table for the Relationship between Social Media and Career Choice

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.476a	.227	.224	3.63204

a. Predictors: (Constant), Social Media

The Model Summary table shows that social media, as a single predictor, accounts for a moderate proportion of the variance in students' career choice. The R value of .476 confirms the strength of the linear relationship between social media and career choice observed in the earlier correlation analysis. The R Square value of .227 indicates that social media alone explains 22.7% of the variability in career choice among students in public day secondary schools in Kiambaa Sub-County, while the remaining 77.3% is attributable to other factors not captured in this single-predictor model, such as family-related factors, peer support, and school resources.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance for the Relationship between Social Media and Career Choice

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1139.958	1	1139.958	86.415	.000b
	Residual	3891.557	295	13.192		
	Total	5031.515	296			

a. Dependent Variable: Career Choices

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Media

The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results in Table 4 indicate that the regression model, with social media as the predictor of career choice, is statistically significant, $F(1, 295) = 86.415$, $p = .000$. Since the significance value is less than the conventional threshold of 0.05 (and even 0.01), the null hypothesis that social media has no linear relationship with career choice is rejected, confirming that the model as a whole is a good fit for the data and that social media significantly predicts variation in students' career choice. The F-statistic represents the ratio of the mean square for the regression (1139.958) to the mean square for the residual (13.192), and its relatively large size further reinforces that the variance explained by social media is substantially greater than the unexplained (error) variance. In practical terms, this result supports interpreting the regression coefficients, as it confirms that social media is not merely correlated with career choice by chance but meaningfully contributes to predicting it among students in public day secondary schools in Kiambaa Sub-County.

These findings corroborate Wong et al. (2022), who similarly found that increased social media use in learning contexts was associated with greater affinity toward specific career paths (in their case, STEM careers) among secondary school students, lending cross-context support to the notion that social media exposure translates into tangible shifts in career-related attitudes and choices. The finding is also consistent with Efunwole and Sijuwade (2023), who reported that a majority of their respondents (67.2%) acknowledged social media as a major influence on their chosen career, and with Adzovie et al. (2025), who found that social media, alongside peer influence, significantly shaped the career choices and aspirations of senior high school students in Ghana. Similarly, in the Kenyan context specifically, this result echoes Njogu et al. (2019), who established a positive and statistically significant relationship between mass media (including internet and mobile-based platforms) and career choice among public secondary school students in Meru County, suggesting that the influence of digital and media platforms on career decision-making is not unique to Kiambaa Sub-County but reflects a broader pattern across Kenyan public secondary schools.

The magnitude of the relationship found in this study, with social media explaining 22.7% of the variance in career choice, offers a more tempered picture than a purely deterministic view of social media's influence would suggest, and this nuance resonates with Nguyen (2024), who found that social media exerted both positive and negative influences on career development: while it broadened students' awareness of diverse career possibilities and connected them with role models, it could equally distort career perceptions through unrealistic portrayals of certain fields. This double-edged characterization, drawn from the literature, is corroborated by the qualitative data obtained from principals and career guidance and counselling teachers in this study, several of whom described social media as simultaneously informative and potentially

misleading, depending on whether students' exposure was complemented by structured career guidance.

Table 5: Coefficient Results for the Relationship between Social Media and Career Choice

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.425	1.047		4.226	.000
	Social Media	.751	.081	.476	9.296	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Career Choices

The Coefficient results provide the specific parameter estimates for the simple regression model, allowing the relationship between social media and career choice to be expressed in concrete, interpretable terms. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = .751$) indicates that for every one-unit increase in social media (on the 5-point Likert scale used to measure the construct), career choice is predicted to increase by .751 units, holding all else constant, while the constant ($B = 4.425$) represents the predicted career choice score when social media is at zero. The standardized coefficient ($Beta = .476$) confirms the moderate-to-strong positive effect size already established in the correlation analysis, expressed here in standardized units that allow direct comparison of effect magnitude once the other predictors are introduced into the full model in subsequent sections. Most critically, the t-value of 9.296 and its associated significance level ($p = .000$), which falls well below the conventional .05 and .01 thresholds, confirm that social media makes a statistically significant individual contribution to predicting career choice, and that this contribution is highly unlikely to be a product of sampling error. The constant term is likewise significant ($t = 4.226$, $p = .000$), indicating that even in the theoretical absence of social media influence, students report a baseline level of career choice orientation, plausibly attributable to the other social factors, such as family, peer, and school-based influences, examined elsewhere in the study. Collectively, these coefficient results reinforce the pattern established across the correlation, model summary, and ANOVA tables: social media exerts a positive, statistically significant, and practically meaningful influence on students' career choice among public day secondary school students in Kiambaa Sub-County, providing robust quantitative grounding for the qualitative theme of social media as an increasingly influential, if double-edged, factor in adolescent career decision-making. This yields the regression equation:

$$\text{Career Choice} = 4.425 + .751 \text{ Social Media}$$

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that social media has become a significant source of career-related information and inspiration for students in public day secondary schools in Kiambaa Sub-County, primarily by shaping how students perceive the desirability and accessibility of different careers. It is concluded that this influence is genuinely double-edged: social media can broaden students' career horizons and connect them with mentors and role models who may otherwise be inaccessible, but it can equally foster unrealistic expectations when students are drawn to careers on the basis of visible online success rather than an accurate understanding of the requirements and realities of those careers. This suggests that social media's net effect on students' career decision-making depends largely on whether its influence is left unexamined or actively engaged with and contextualized through structured career guidance.

6. Recommendations

Arising from the finding that social media significantly predicts career choice among students in public day secondary schools in Kiambaa Sub-County, the following recommendations inform theory, practice, and policy.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

The finding that social media independently explains a meaningful proportion of variance in students' career choice suggests that established career development theories, including Social Cognitive Career Theory, Super's Developmental Theory, and Holland's Theory of Career Choice, would benefit from more explicit theoretical accommodation of digital and social media influence as a distinct contextual factor. These theories were largely conceptualised prior to the pervasive role that social media now plays in adolescents' socialisation and information-seeking, and while constructs such as outcome expectations, contextual supports, and vicarious learning can be extended to accommodate social media exposure, this study recommends that scholars working within these frameworks explicitly theorise social media as a distinct proximal environmental influence, alongside family, peer, and school-based factors, given its demonstrated independent predictive strength. Future theory-building and model refinement in career development research should therefore treat social media not merely as a subset of peer or environmental influence, but as a construct warranting its own theoretical specification and measurement.

6.2 Recommendations for Practice

Schools should formally incorporate social media literacy into their career guidance programmes, equipping students with the skills to critically evaluate career-related content encountered online and to distinguish realistic career information from idealised or misleading portrayals. Career guidance and counselling teachers should proactively engage with the specific career-related content and platforms that students already follow, using these as an entry point for structured discussions that contextualise online portrayals of careers against the practical requirements, challenges, and realistic prospects of those careers. Schools should further consider integrating brief, recurring social-media-focused sessions into existing guidance and counselling schedules, rather than treating this as a one-off intervention, given the continuously evolving nature of online career content and trends.

6.3 Recommendations for Policy

The Ministry of Education and the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development should consider formally embedding digital and social media literacy, specifically as it relates to career decision-making, within the career guidance component of the national curriculum, ensuring consistent implementation across public day secondary schools rather than leaving it to individual schools' discretion. Relevant government agencies, professional bodies, and career-focused organisations should strategically leverage social media platforms to disseminate accurate, engaging, and representative information about a wide range of career pathways, including less visible but viable careers, in order to counterbalance the disproportionate visibility currently enjoyed by a narrow set of highly publicised professions. Policymakers should also consider supporting partnerships between the Ministry of Education, professional bodies, and social media platforms to develop verified, youth-targeted career content, reducing students' reliance on unverified or purely aspirational sources of career information.

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