ASSESSING GRATIFICATION INFLUENCE OF SELECT DIGITAL COMMUNICATION TOUCHPOINTS ON THE ONLINE ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOUR OF MILLENNIALS IN NAIROBI.

By

KENNETH K. MBURU

A thesis submitted to the School of Communication, Cinematic and Creative Arts in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Master Arts in Communication Studies

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AUGUST 2018
Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other college, institution or university other than the United States International University in Nairobi for academic credit.

Signed: _______________________________          Date: __________________________

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Approval Page

In accordance with United States International University – Africa policies, this thesis is accepted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Communication Studies.

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, digital communication has grown in importance as the number of internet users continues to grow. This growth has had an enormous implication on how brands engage with their audiences. Although both scholars and practitioners have jointly acknowledged the capabilities of the internet as a communication tool that has great potentials and advantages, there remains a scarcity of knowledge on factors affecting online engagement behaviour. This study sought to fill this gap by assessing how entertainment, information and irritation in using select digital communication platforms influence the online engagement behaviour of millennials in Nairobi. The theoretical perspective guiding this research was the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Data for the study was collected using a survey conducted through administering online questionnaires to millennials living in Nairobi. Findings indicate that the level of entertainment, informativeness and irritation on a website, mobile app or banner ad are key factors in influencing online engagement behaviour. Entertainment and informativeness were found to have a positive influence on engagement while irritation had a negative influence. The study further identified that the extent to which these factors have an influence on online engagement behaviour was influenced by gender, age, income level but not education level. The study recommends that brands should incorporate entertaining and informative content that has minimal irritation if they are to effectively engage the millennials cohort in Nairobi.

Keywords: Online Communication, Digital Media, Entertainment, Informativeness, Irritation, Brand, Touchpoints.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration................................................................................................................................. iii
COPYRIGHT............................................................................................................................. v
ABSTRACT.............................................................................................................................. vi
Acknowledgement .................................................................................................................. vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS ........................................................................................................... viii
List of Tables ............................................................................................................................ x
List of Figures .......................................................................................................................... xi
Definition of Terms ................................................................................................................ xii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND ......................................................... 1
  1.1 Background of the Problem ............................................................................................... 3
  1.2 Statement of the Problem ................................................................................................. 4
  1.3 Purpose of the Study ......................................................................................................... 5
  1.4 Research Objectives ....................................................................................................... 5
  1.5 Rationale of the Study ...................................................................................................... 6
  1.6 Significance of the Study ................................................................................................. 6
  1.7 Scope of the Study .......................................................................................................... 7
  1.8 Assumptions of the Study ............................................................................................... 8

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................................. 9
  2.1 Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................... 9
  2.2 Digital Communication .................................................................................................. 16
  2.3 Online Engagement Behaviour ..................................................................................... 19
  2.4 The Entertainment Value of Digital Media ................................................................... 20
  2.5 Information Value ......................................................................................................... 21
  2.6 Irritation Value .............................................................................................................. 23
  2.7 Digital Communication Touchpoints .......................................................................... 24
  2.8 Millennials and Digital Communication ..................................................................... 30
  2.9 Conceptual Framework ................................................................................................. 32
  2.10 Research Hypothesis .................................................................................................... 33
  2.11 Chapter Summary ........................................................................................................ 34

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ................................................................. 35
3.1 Research Approach ................................................................. 35
3.2 Population and Sampling Design ............................................. 35
3.3 Data Collection Methods and Instrument ................................... 36
3.4 Research Procedures ................................................................ 37
3.5 Ethics ....................................................................................... 39
3.6 Chapter Summary ..................................................................... 39

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS .................................. 40
4.1 Descriptive Data ...................................................................... 40
4.2 Results According to Research Hypotheses ............................... 43
4.3 Factors Influencing Online Engagement ................................. 48
4.4 Factors Affecting how Often People Click on Web Banners .... 50
4.5 Chapter Summary .................................................................... 51

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 53
5.1 Discussion ............................................................................... 53
5.2 Factors Affecting Online Engagement Among Millennials ....... 56
5.3 Recommendations for Practice: ............................................. 58
5.4 Recommendations for Policy Makers and Regulators .......... 60
5.5 Implications, Limitations and Recommendation for Further Studies ... 61
5.6 Conclusion .............................................................................. 62

REFERENCES ............................................................................... 64

APPENDICES ................................................................................. 70
Appendix 1: USIU -A Institutional Review Board Approval ........... 70
Appendix 2: NACOSTI Approval .................................................. 71
Appendix 3: Informed Consent Forms .......................................... 72
Appendix 4: Data Collection Instrument- Sample Questionnaire .... 73
Appendix 5: Nairobi County Map – Study Area ............................ 80
Appendix 6: Study Timeline .......................................................... 80
Appendix 7: Project Budget ......................................................... 81
List of Tables

Table 1 Selected media uses and gratifications typologies 1941-2011 ...................... 14
Table 2 Nairobi Population ...................................................................................... 36
Table 3 Summary of Cronbach’s alpha test results .................................................. 43
Table 4 Statements Relating to Entertainment and Online Engagement ..................... 44
Table 5 Statements Relating to Information and Online Engagement ....................... 45
Table 6 Statements Relating to Irritation and Online Engagement ............................ 47
List of Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework .................................................................33
Figure 2. Conceptual Framework .................................................................33
Figure 3. Respondents’ Age ........................................................................41
Figure 4. Platform's Frequency ....................................................................42
Figure 5. Comparison of age and online engagement behaviour .................49
Figure 6. Comparison of income and online engagement behaviour ..........50
Definition of Terms

Millennial. The age group that covers those born between the years 1980 and 1999 (Meister, Willyerd, & Foss, 2010). For the purpose of this study, those involved were aged between the ages of 18 and 37 years.

Touchpoint. A point of contact or interaction, especially between a business and its customers (Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016). For this study, touchpoints are defined as the platforms used by a brand to reach its consumers. They include websites, mobile applications, and web advertisements.

Online engagement. Online engagement is the interaction between people across the internet (Bonsón & Ratkai, 2013). In this study, online engagement is defined as the repeated visit of a website, repeat use of a mobile application, the clicking of web advertisement and the writing of online reviews.

Mobile application. A software application developed specifically for use on small, wireless computing devices, such as smartphones and tablets, rather than desktop or laptop computers (Salehan & Negahban, 2013). In this study, a mobile application is any such devices that can be used by brands to pass information to consumers’.

Ad blocking. Ad blocking is the use of a software to remove or alter advertising content from a webpage, website, or a mobile app (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2016).

Web banner ad. A web banner ad is a form of online communication on the World Wide Web that is delivered by an ad server. It is a communication material that is embedded into a web page with the purpose of directing users to a pre-specified platform (Shah, et al., 2007).

Website. A website is a collection of related web pages, including multimedia content, typically identified with a common domain name, and published on at least one web server (Stein, 2009).

Mobile app. A mobile app is a computer program designed to run on a mobile device such as a phone/tablet or watch (Ling & Typhina, 2016).
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

Digital communication is the systematic use of devices connected to the internet such as computers, tablets, smartphones and game consoles to exchange information. It has increasingly become a preferred form of communication by brands as they seek to reach their target audiences. A study by Deloitte (2015) revealed that media consumption across the globe is increasingly happening in digital formats. Forbes Insights (2005) notes that the ability of digital communication to deliver targeted messages to specific audiences has led to an increase in the importance of this form of communication.

Additionally, an increase in the number of devices capable of supporting digital media along with the increase in internet penetration and better connectivity speeds, has provided consumers with an option to access content of their choice, be it entertainment, information or social activity anytime, anywhere. Studies seeking to understand media consumption trends and more specifically users’ affinity towards use of digital communication have consistently shown that there has been an incremental shift from traditional media to new (digital) media as the preferred information source (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Mangold, & Faulds, 2009; Mulhern, 2009; Wei & Hindman, 2011).

Interestingly, one generation has been the key driver in this trend – the millennials. There are differing definitions on who is a millennial. This study borrowed Meister, Willyerd and Foss (2010) definition of millennials as people born between 1980 and 1999. This is because the definition broadly encompasses the differing classifications of millennials. This generation has a tendency and preference for consuming digital media. Rangel (2017) noted that this is because they are the first
generation to grow up in the digital age where their world is saturated with various forms of digital media. They are therefore able to embrace rapid technological changes.

The increasing popularity of digital media has led to a paradigm shift in the global advertising trends where advertisers have been forced to adjust their tactics by increasingly allocating more budget to digital communication (Kinyanjui, 2011; McCarthy, 2017). Consequently, this has led to an increase in the focus on digital communication with an aim of increasing the efficiency of key digital communication platforms that include websites, mobile applications, online ads among others.

In line with global trends, Kenyans are consuming content on digital platforms (Nyamamu, 2014). The rise in internet usage and penetration in Kenya has been quite sharp, making the country the fourth in Africa behind Nigeria, Egypt and South Africa and position 33 in the world (International Telecommunication Union – ITU, 2014). Increasing internet penetration, mobile device proliferation and the convenience of consuming content anytime, anywhere are among the key drivers for this trend (Deloitte, 2015). According to the Communications Authority of Kenya, (2017), total internet subscriptions in Kenya rose by 10.2 percent in July 2017 to register 29.6 million subscribers as compared to the same period in the previous year. The report attributed the growth to increased use of mobile data services mainly by young people in addition to increasingly affordable internet tariffs, continued decrease in the price of smartphones as the well widespread availability of mobile phone handsets. The report’s findings are corroborated by e-commerce retail giant Jumia Kenya who indicated that 58% of all phones that were sold in Kenya in the year 2015 were smartphones (Zab, 2015).

With the increase in internet usage, various online platforms are becoming the go-to channels for information dissemination in Kenya as goods and services are sought
over the internet. This has created new and significant opportunities for communicators who want to effectively engage with their target audiences.

1.1 **Background of the Problem**

While digital communication is an obvious choice for reaching millennials given that they spend a vast amount of time online, Smith (2011) noted that it can be nominal when the target audience views it as obtrusive and annoying due to the amount and/or type of adverts and business posts interrupting their online experience. Additionally, there is growing concern that some elements of digital communication are intrusive leading to the increased use of techniques such as ad blocking as users look for smoother, non-interrupted, and private online experiences. The need for a smooth online experience was highlighted by a report by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) (2016) that showed more than 25 per cent of internet users had installed a form of ad blocker in the device that they were using to access the internet with. Too many messages, which were disruptive and unrelatable ranked high among the reasons why millennials had installed ad blockers. The use of techniques such as ad blocking is detrimental to the entire digital communication ecosystem that thrives on the ability to deliver targeted messages to the intended audience.

Past research further confirms that messages that interrupt a consumer’s online activity result in brand attrition (Li, Edwards, & Lee 2002; McCoy, Everard, Polak, & Galletta, 2008). A great example is the use of pop-up advertisements where due to the number of advertisements clogging the users’ experience, consumers were found to purposefully avoid looking at an advert and potentially becoming irritated and annoyed at the brand behind the advertisement for disrupting their internet surfing experience (McCoy et al., 2008).
Therefore, there is a need for research that identifies the balance between passing information while maintaining a smooth online experience for the consumer. Guided by constructs from the time-honoured media use theory, Uses and Gratifications, this paper sought to assess how select gratifications of using three main online platforms: websites, mobile applications, and web advertisements, affect the online engagement behaviour of millennials in Nairobi. It is important to state that the platforms being studied can all be used by brands as channels to pass information to online audiences.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

According to the national bureau of statistics, millennials are estimated to compose forty-three per cent of the total Kenyan population. In Nairobi county alone, the millennial population constitutes forty-eight per cent of the total population (KNBS, 2014). The total Nairobi Population as per the National census of 2009 stood at 3,134,798 (KNBS, 2014). A report by Price Waterhouse Coopers, PWC, (2016) noted that the millennial generation is the single largest group with the highest purchasing power. Furthermore, given that they are also the first truly digital generation, they are online nearly all the time including when they want to make purchase decisions inside a store (McCoy et al., 2008). This makes them a prime target for various brands.

Despite their large numbers, little empirical research has been undertaken to explore how millennials in Kenya engage with communication passed across digital platforms. Most studies undertaken in this area have been in other contexts (Cheng, et. al., 2010; Haque, et al., 2007; Kwek, et. al., 2010; Narges, et. al., 2011; Shelly et. al., 2000; Wang, et. al., 2009; Wei, et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2006) making it difficult to draw inferences on the Kenyan consumer. This study therefore sought to address this gap by
establishing how three key digital communication factors, entertainment, informativeness and web irritation influence the online engagement behaviour of millennials living in Nairobi. The online engagement behaviours that this study sought to investigate were: repeat usage, writing of online reviews and clicks on a banner ad within websites, mobile applications and web banner ads.

1.3 **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to assess how select gratifications namely entertainment, informativeness and web irritation in using websites, mobile applications and web advertisements, as key digital communication touchpoints, affect the online engagement behaviour of millennials in Nairobi.

1.4 **Research Objectives**

To help brands and advertisers in Kenya effectively communicate with millennials in the digital space, this study aimed at establishing how the use of select digital communication platforms – websites, mobile applications and online advertisements - affected the engagement behaviours of millennials living in Nairobi. The engagement behaviours sought to be observed included, repeat website visits, repeat mobile app usage, online ads click-through and written online reviews. The main objectives of the research are as indicated below:

- Assess how entertainment gratification in the use of websites, mobile apps, and online ads affects the engagement behaviour of millennials.
- Assess how informative gratification in the use of websites, mobile apps, and online ads affects the engagement behaviour of millennials.
- Assess how web irritation in the use of websites, mobile apps, and online ads affects the engagement behaviour of millennials.
• Assess how various demographic factors, gender, age, education level and income affect online engagement behaviour of millennials.

1.5 Rationale of the Study

Online engagement has been described as the catalyst that converts prospects to consumers, consumers to loyal customers, and loyal customers to vocal brand advocates (Dolan, Conduit, & Fahy, 2015). It is for this reason that a majority of brands are looking to positively engage with their customers. However, there has been little knowledge of how engagement behaviour correlates with the motives and/or gratifications for consuming content transmitted via digital platforms. This study sought to fill this gap by assessing how the entertainment, information worthiness and irritation components of digital communication touchpoints affect the engagement tendency of the target audience.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Owing to the increase in the range of affordable mobile handsets, a relatively high proportion of Kenyan consumers are using mobile phones to access the internet. This has provided brands with a new avenue to target and reach their audience. However, the success or failure of using a digital platform to reach consumers is highly pegged on how the target audience reacts to the communication they receive (Craig & Yousuf, 2013).

This study serves to provide crucial information on what works if brands are to use websites, mobile applications and online ads as channels to reach their millennial audience. By taking into consideration what millennials find as effective digital communication techniques, brand managers, marketers, agencies, among other people who are involved in creating digital communication messages can enhance the effectiveness of online communications targeted to the millennial audience. The study
has the tenacity to provide strategic implications and directions for the development of digital communication strategies for companies/marketers/agencies wishing to engage with millennials in Kenya.

Additionally, this study purposed to contribute to the already existing uses and gratifications theory, and its applicability in the 21st Century. Further, the research provides a domesticated study of the theory for any scholar who might be interested to draw from the Kenyan perspective.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The study aimed at assessing how various forms of gratifications affect the online engagement behaviour of millennials. The study was limited to Kenyan audience living in Nairobi and aged between 18 and 38 years. This age set is selected based on the definition of millennials that is guiding this study. The study focused on this age group given that they are tech-driven and consume majority of their information in the digital space (Odhiambo, 2014; PWC, 2016). Additionally, very few studies have been done on this age group in terms of their online engagement behaviour. Nairobi was selected as the ideal location given that it has a high population of millennials in addition to having a high internet penetration rate (Nyamamu, 2014; Communications Authority of Kenya, 2017).

While acknowledging that there are various digital communication platforms that can be used to engage with millennials, this study focused on websites, mobile applications, and online advertisements as they broadly represent a brand’s key touchpoints in digital communication.

The study was conducted within a span of two months. This was a feasible duration to gather data from the sample population. The months of February – March 2018 were selected for convenience purposes.
The study focused on repeat website visits, repeat app usage, online advertisement click-through and online review writing as the measure for online engagement. This was because the four metrics capture different levels of the desired online engagement and provide clear and interpretable characterizations of user online engagement with the selected touchpoints.

1.8 Assumptions of the Study

The study was guided by the uses and gratification theory. Among the assumptions made while carrying out the study is that the respondents had the power to distinguish the various forms of digital media and that they have clear intent in its use. Additionally, the study assumed that the respondents had enough self-awareness of the various platforms being studied, their use, and working and were therefore able to provide an accurate picture of their use.

Chapter Summary

The chapter is divided into various key sections. The chapter begins by defining digital communication before giving a detailed explanation of the importance of digital communication and why the focus was on millennials. This is then followed by a section detailing the background of the problem in the context of the digital communication industry. Thereafter, sections providing the purpose, rationale, and significance of the study are explored. The next chapter covers the literature review.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Communication scholars in different parts of the world have devoted a great deal of time to study the engagement behaviour of consumers of different media in countries of their interest (Boulianne, 2009; Calder, Malthouse & Schaedel, 2009; Chu & Kim, 2011; Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2010; White & Le Cornu, 2011). Central to many of these studies is the uses and gratification theory that seeks to unearth why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs (Ruggiero, 2000). The bulk of these studies focus on consumer’s motives and gratifications derived from using varied media. Such motives and gratifications include entertainment, emotional relief; pass time, wishful thinking, escapism, social interaction, information seeking surveillance, tension release needs among others (Rubin, 1983). This review of literature focuses on some of these variables.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical perspective guiding this research is the uses and gratifications theory, which focuses on the reasons or motives behind an individuals’ use of technology and media (Ruggiero, 2000). Various researchers have used this theory to successfully establish the gratifications that consumers derive from using various media such as radio (Herzog, 1952), TV (Rubin, 1983) electronic bulletins (Shao, 2009) during their formative years of use. Given that digital media is a new form of media – after print, radio and TV-it is prudent to use the uses and gratification theory as a basis for forming the fundamentals of understanding the motives that consumers have while using this media.
According to Ruggiero (2000), the gratifications or benefits that attract and hold audiences to a particular type of media and the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological needs form the basis of the Uses and Gratification theory. Early researchers formulated different classification of gratifications that were obtained and which fuelled the continued use of particular media. For instance, while examining the reasons why women listened to daytime radio programs, Herzog (1941) established that the audience had varying motivations for their actions. Using interviews as the preferred data collection method, He chose women who regularly listened to daytime radio programs as the basis of the study. Questions used in the study included, “What do the programs mean to you?” “Why do you listen to the programs?” and “What do you do with what you hear on the programs?”. From this study, the researcher established that people sought out three distinct types of gratification from listening to soap operas on radio. The three gratifications sought were: emotional release, wishful thinking, and educational gratification. These gratifications are further discussed below:

**Emotional release gratification.** Herzog (1941) noted that radio programs acted as emotional stimuli that gave listeners the platform for emotional release. She noted that listeners would tune in to cry, laugh, get excited, or even get emotional relief by learning that other people also had problems.

**Wishful thinking gratification.** Herzog (1941) noted that listening was a leeway for wishful thinking, reporting that listeners tended to adopt the character heard on radio in order to be able to experience what is occurring in the radio program. Radio programs were seen to offer listeners the occasion to imagine a happier situation, revel in other people’s success, or even relive the past through the actions of the characters’ in the radio programs.
**Educational gratification.** Under listening for education, Herzog (1941) highlighted that the radio programs offered listeners an ideology by which they could look at their own situation. She noted that listeners learned from the social examples of characters in radio programs and applied this knowledge to future potential situations (Herzog, 1941).

In addition to establishing the above distinct gratifications, Herzog (1941) also identified that there was a correlation between the number of programs listened to per day and the complexity of the listener’s troubles. The study further noted that “the more complex the listener’s troubles were or the less able a listener is to cope with their problem, the more programs they were likely to listen to (Herzog, 1941).

Building on Herzog’s research, and as different media became more and more popular, different scholars in the 1940s became interested in understanding why audiences consumed media differently (Laserzfield & Stanton, 1944; Herzog, 1944; Warner & Henry, 1948). McQuail (1983) noted that there was a spirited effort dating back to the era of empirical mass communication research to explore the gratifications that motivated people to be attracted to particular media. In the various studies, different researchers came up with various reasons as to why people consumed various media. Some of the reasons were specific to the content on the medium while others were specific to the medium itself (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974b). For instance, radio soap operas were found to satisfy their listeners with advice, support, or occasions for emotional release (Herzog, 1944; Warner & Henry, 1948). On the other hand, newspapers were discovered to offer readers a sense of security, structure of daily routine, and a source of shared topics of conversation in addition to providing information (Berelson, 1949). The varying
reasons why people consumed different media was what Herzog (1944) classified as with the term “gratifications.”

With the growth of television (TV) in the mid-20th century, the Uses and gratifications approach became prevalent as scholars tried to understand why people were consuming content on this media. Blumler (1979) examined why people were watching certain TV programs during the 1964 election in the United Kingdom. The researchers were able to categorize the audiences according to motive. This information would later inform a research to understand the motive of consuming TV. They classified the audiences’ motives into four main categories i.e. (1) Diversion (2) Personal relationships (3) Personal identity and (4) Surveillance (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972).

On the same breadth, Blumler and Katz in 1974 conducted what was perhaps the most comprehensive research on media use at the time. According to the two scholars, media use was motivated by the following gratifications: surveillance, guidance, anticipated communication, excitement and personal reinforcement (Blumler & Katz, 1974). The findings echoed those of Becker (1979) who conducted a research to unearth which gratifications were the most salient among media users. Gratifications such as surveillance and guidance were seen to be more salient as compared to other gratifications like personal reinforcement, excitement and communicatory.

Early research on uses and gratifications saw the list of gratifications that users derive from using a particular media increase or decrease depending on the audience, time, and researchers’ objectives. For instance, while Herzog found three gratifications - emotional release, wishful thinking, and educational – that users derived from using radio, Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rayburn II (1980) found at least five gratifications that users
derived from using television i.e. surveillance, guidance, anticipated communication, excitement, and personal reinforcement.

Furthermore, Blumler and Katz, 1974 established that audiences derived four main gratifications for using media. The first is diversion or entertainment where people used media to get away from everyday problems and routine (escapism). Personal relationships are the second where people use media as a substitute for real emotional and interpersonal interaction. Thirdly is personal identity where people find themselves reflected in texts and TV programs from where they also learn behaviours and values. Lastly is surveillance where people use the media to satisfy their need for information (Blumler & Katz, 1974).

As shown in Table 1, the uses and gratifications model has guided studies in nearly all media formats including digital media. Ruggiero (2000) notes that the theory has always provided one of the best theoretical approaches in conceptualizing the usage of each new mass communications medium at its initial stages. In his research on uses and gratifications model usage in the 21st century, Ruggiero (2000) argues that the emergence of computer-mediated communication has boosted the theoretical importance of the uses and gratifications theory. Based on the key assumption of the uses and gratifications theory that audiences are active rather than passive, internet as a facilitator of online communication has strengthened the applicability of the uses and gratifications theory. This is mainly because of the interactive nature of internet usage. Kiousis (2002) defined interactivity as, the degree to which participants in the communication process have control over, and can exchange roles in their mutual discourse.
Table 1: Selected media uses and gratifications typologies 1941-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s) and years</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Gratifications/Motives derived</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herzog (1941)</td>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>Emotional release, wishful thinking and educational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch</td>
<td>Mass Media</td>
<td>Education, entertainment, social interaction, escapism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubin (1983)</td>
<td>Television</td>
<td>Entertainment, pass time, escape, information, companionship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payne et al. (1998)</td>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>Diversion, surveillance, interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Keefe and Sulanowski</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>Entertainment, social ability, acquisition, time management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaye (1998)</td>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>Entertainment, pass time, escape, social interaction, information,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>website preference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papacharissi and Rubin</td>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>Entertainment, pass time, interpersonal utility, irritation,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2000)</td>
<td></td>
<td>information seeking, convenience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson and Perse (2000)</td>
<td>TV and web surfing</td>
<td>Entertainment, pass time, relaxation, social information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leung (2001)</td>
<td>Instant Messaging</td>
<td>Entertainment, affection, relaxation, fashion, inclusion, sociability, escape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papacharissi (2002)</td>
<td>Personal home pages</td>
<td>Entertainment, pass time, likeliness, information, self-expression,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>professional advancement, communication with friends and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ko et al. (2005)</td>
<td>The Internet</td>
<td>Entertainment, social interaction, information, convenience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diddi and LaRose (2006)</td>
<td>Internet news</td>
<td>Entertainment, escapism, habit, pass time, surveillance, news quizzes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith (2011)</td>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>Personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, tension release needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communication literature reflects that with the coming of the internet as new media, the gratifications sought by users have continually changed and in the process, the original Herzog, (1941) list of gratifications sought has been widely extended. For instance, McQuail (2000) listed information, personal identity, entertainment, integration, and social interaction as the gratifications sought by users of the new media.

Recent research done on uses and gratifications theory after the emergence of the internet has shown that the use of personal computers has been linked to individuals’ motivations to use the internet for communication purposes linked to the fulfilment of gratifications such as social identity, learning, interpersonal communication, para-social interaction, companionship, escape, entertainment, and surveillance (Ruggiero, 2000).

Other forms of gratifications that users derive from the new media include sociability (Fulk, Flanagin, Kalman, Monge, & Ryan, 1996), involvement (Trevino & Webster, 1992), inconvenience (Stolz, 1995; Thomas, 1995), isolation (Dorsher, 1996), playfulness, choice, connectedness, information collection, and reciprocal communication (Ha & James, 1998).

From the above literature, there are various forms of gratifications and motives that are derived from using digital media, some more salient than others. Within the digital communication field, the most salient gratifications/motives that influence user consumption of digital media include entertainment, informativeness and irritation (Diddi & LaRose, 2006; Papacharissi, 2002; Smith, 2011; Ducoffe, 1995; Okazaki, Katsukura, & Nishiyama, 2007; O’ Donohoe, 1994). These motives have been further studied in the context of digital communication and their influence on the online engagement behaviour of millennials below.
2.2 Digital Communication

As stated earlier, digital communication is the systematic use of devices connected to the internet such as computers, tablets, smartphones and game consoles to exchange information. This practice encompasses an extensive selection of product, services and brand messaging techniques that mainly utilize the internet to deliver information to selected customers. It has increasingly become a preferred method of communicating both globally and locally (Kinyanjui, 2011; McCarthy, 2017). In Kenya, the incredible increase in internet penetration and smartphone penetration has had a positive influence on this trend. As noted by Zab (2015) Measures taken by the Kenyan government that include investing in undersea optic fibre cables with the aim of expanding internet penetration has helped this process. Additionally, the fierce competition between telecoms has led to a significant reduction in data cost which has resulted in an increase in the number of Kenyans connected to the internet.

The few studies conducted in Kenya have consistently shown that the consumption of digital media has been on a steady rise. For instance, Nabea (2009) while investigating media advertising trends in Kenya with special attention to current trends and development of new trends established that many Kenyans are embracing new forms of communication. The study in particular showed that 78% of Kenyans visit key websites while browsing in order to get more information in regards to a particular advertiser. From the study, Nabea (2009) recommended that brands should take bold steps in embracing new forms of digital communication in order to make their message easily accessible to their target audience.

Further, a study on internet usage in Kenya showed that there has been an increase in internet usage within the country (Wambu, 2017) The study indicated that there was a
significant 5% increase in the number of Kenyans aged over 16 years who had access to the internet in the year 2017 compared to 2016. The study further indicated that about 59% of Kenyans consume the internet through mobile phones, which is almost double the global rate of mobile usage to access the internet.

Ferguson and Perse (2000) remarked that digital means of communicating is so prevalent that customers can have access to information from wherever they are and whenever they choose too. PWC (2016) adds that the proliferation of digital media has ended the era where the communication that people got about a product or service consisted of only what a company wanted them to know.

With the growth of the digital communication practice, there has been an increased focus on unearthing techniques that appeal, motivate and engage web users (Smith, 2011; Smith, 2012). According to Loader, Vromen, and Xenos (2014), this stems from the fact that the digital communication field, which has sub-sectors such as social media, display advertising, video advertising, search engine optimization, email, influencer promotion among others, has become one of the most widely used means of communicating and engaging with audiences.

Through the content on their digital platforms, brands have the opportunity to provide their audience – potential customers - with an interactive avenue to create value and engage with them. However, in order to reap the full benefits of digital media, Loader, et al. (2014) noted that brands needed to encourage their audience to not only consume their content passively, but to also engage with it.

**Motives for using digital communication.** Benady (2014) contended that digital media has provided brands with an avenue to reach and engage with their consumers in a
timelier and more relevant manner. The scholar notes that one of the key objectives of using digital media by brands is to attract customers and give them an opportunity to interact with it in order to grow their loyalty. Furthermore, research has shown that there is a considerable shift in the consumers’ decision-making process. Nielsen, (2013) noted that a significant 59% of people interviewed in a research conducted to understand how the internet is affecting new product purchase decision, found out that the majority of people were more likely to make a purchase decision after learning about a product or service through active internet research.

Further, in a study to establish the influence of social media on brand equity, Odhiambo (2014) observed that digital communication, when properly utilized, offers companies the opportunity to target, interact, and get feedback from their consumers. The study further noted that businesses in the 21st century cannot ignore digital communication as it provides them with the platform to reach a larger audience, making their communication efforts much simpler, cost-effective, and easier to build brand equity.

With the understanding that communication is ultimately what connects brands to their current and potential clients, brands are beginning to pay more attention to various digital communication touchpoints in a bid to increase their communication efficiency.

**Need for engagement in digital communication.** Digital communication has introduced a new platform that has a more relevant role in business models i.e. the extended possibility to get consumers engaged with brands online (Kim, Kim, & Wachter, 2013). Online customer engagement has emerged in the digital communication field as an important concept. Wirtz, et al. (2013, p.4) identified customer engagement as a significant topic in digital communication and described this construct as customers’ behavioural
manifestation toward a brand or firm beyond purchase, which emanates from motivational drivers including: word-of-mouth activity, recommendations, customer-to-customer interactions, blogging, writing reviews, and other similar activities”.

Brodie, Hollebeek, and Conduit (2015) argued that there are various reasons why a customer may choose to engage with a brand key among them is the need to acquire product information, reduce perceived risks, and even connect with the brand leading to loyalty. McEwen (2005) further notes that a truly engaged customer must have an enduring psychological connection with the brand in addition to behavioural participation, thereby underlining the significance of customer engagement.

Within the digital communication field, the level of engagement on a website could be a key determinant of both consumer adoption and usage of the said website (Al-Ghaith, Sanzogni, & Sandhu, 2010). Further Mwangi (2014) notes that within the Kenyan online space, engagement is has gained popularity as a means of increasing brand loyalty. The study further notes that online engagement offers brands the opportunity to have information that can be consumed by consumers both in real time and long afterwards regardless of location. This in addition to adding a human-to-human interaction element.

2.3 Online Engagement Behaviour

There have been various studies on the connection between digital communication and online engagement (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; De Vries et al., 2012; Lin & Lu, 2011; Muntinga et al., 2011).

Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) described online engagement as ‘a psychological state of users characterized by interactive, co-creative user experiences with a focal agent and object’ adding that it can be operationalized with variables such as liking, commenting,
clicking and sharing. This definition is further refined by Bonnemann, 2013 who described online engagement as the use of information and communications technologies to support, enhance, or extend public participation and civic engagement processes. Digital communication tools such as website, mobile apps, social media, online tools, multimedia elements among others can be experienced through computers, smartphones, tablets and other devices. These tools enable users to create and share content, and to interact with other users with whom they share a connection.

However, as noted earlier, there are factors that influence user consumption of digital media. They include entertainment value, information value and irritation value. These constructs are further explored in the subsequent section.

2.4 The Entertainment Value of Digital Media

The entertainment value refers to the extent to which the web media is fun and entertaining to the users (Vladica, 2012). Based on the uses and gratifications model, it has been demonstrated that the value of media entertainment lies in its ability to fulfil users needs for escapism, pleasure-seeking, aesthetic enjoyment, or emotional release (McQuail, 1983). Previous research suggests that providing higher entertainment value is likely to lead to an advantage for media users and to motivate them to use the media more often. For instance, Dahlen (2001), while researching on the impact of entertaining advertising on consumer responses, found that there was a relationship between entertaining web banners and brand loyalty. They concluded that users who perceived a web banner ad as entertaining were likely to be more loyal to the advertising brand. These results mirror the findings of Sicilia and Palazón (2008) who also found that an entertaining advertisement leads to positive attitudes toward the advertisement.
Similarly, in a research to explore how the appeal of media characters inform media usage, Tarafdar and Zhang (2008) found that an entertaining advertisement leads to a desire to repeatedly visit a website. Online entertaining advertisements were also found to be effective in having users consume, create and even contribute to brand-related content online (Lyons, 2017). In a research to determine millennials’ perception towards mobile marketing in Nairobi’s central business district, Odhiambo (2014) noted that the entertainment value of a given communication positively shaped the perception of millennials. The study further observed that entertainment value positively reinforces the communication that a brand intends to pass across. This view was similar to that of Ogutu, Ogutu and Njanja (2014) who discovered that entertainment is a key factor that should be incorporated into advertising messages to capture recipients’ interest and to generate favourable consumers’ attitude.

Through the application of uses and gratification theory in the context of digital communication, the entertainment value of digital communication can be an important motive that influences the online engagement behaviour of millennials. (Lin & Lu, 2011).

### 2.5 Information Value

Various scholars have identified the need for information as a key motivation to use digital media (Bauer et al., 2005; Ducoffe, 1995; Ko et al., 2005; Xu et al., 2009). Azab (2012) defined informativeness as the extent to which the web provides users with resourceful and helpful information. Further, Boyd & Ellison (2007) identified that informativeness can increase the perceived value of a brand that is sending out a communication. This view is similar to that of Mwangi (2014) who identified that informativeness of the communication sent out on digital platforms can have a positive
effect on a company’s brand equity. As highlighted by Bauer & Greyser (1968) in a study that sought to establish the effectiveness of advertising as an institution and gauging how the public feels about advertisements, they argued that media users consider advertisements’ ability to provide new information as the fundamental reason for accepting an advertisement in the first place. Similarly, in a study to examine factors that affect consumers’ likelihood to use mobile apps, David and Michael (2014) found that the level of interest in a retail app is positively related to the consumer's intention to engage in information-sharing activities.

Even with young children, the informativeness construct seems to have a significant effect on how they behave online. In a survey research aimed at examining the motivations for young consumers' internet use and their behaviour post-internet use, Lwin, Miyazaki, Stanaland, and Lee (2012) sampled children aged between 10 and 12 years and found that information-seeking motivations affected their willingness to disclose information. This is supported by Leung and Wei’s (2000) assertion that the most important reason why people go online is to gather information. Lim and Ting (2012) further suggested that the quality of information placed on a company’s website has a direct influence on customers’ perceptions of the company and thereby shaping the formation of user attitudes, which then affect their engagement behaviour. These results are similar to those of Osewe (2013), who in a study to establish the effectiveness of internet advertising on the behaviour of University of Nairobi students, noted that informativeness of advertisements placed on the internet was a key factor in influencing the consumer behaviour since it had a significant relationship with attitude formation and purchase decision. Further, Lyons (2017) argued that searching for and receiving
information about a company is one of the main gratifications of consumer participation in online engagement.

Through the application of uses and gratification theory in the context of digital communication, the informativeness value of digital communication can be an important motive that influences the online engagement behaviour of millennials.

2.6 Irritation Value

Just like information, irritation is also a key determinant of digital media use. Under the uses and gratifications theory, the irritation construct refers to the extent to which the web is messy and irritating to media users (Raines, 2013). While studying the irritation of advertising on the web, Azab (2012) found that irritating web banner ads might exploit human anxiety, distract consumers’ attention, and dilute their online experiences. This is in line with Bauer and Greyser’s (1968) study where they found a positive correlation between the tendency of criticizing adverts and the annoyance or irritation posed by the said advert. Luo (2002) noted that irritation may even lead to a general reduction of an ad’s effectiveness and perceived value to the audience. Applied to the digital communication space, irritation may lead to a dislike of a particular form of advertisement. For instance Baek and Morimoto (2012) noted that an increase in irritation brought about by continuous pop-up ads leads to avoidance or scepticism thereby concluding that there is a correlation between irritation and ad avoidance. Smith (2011,) in a research to establish the digital marketing techniques that millennials prefer, found that pop-up banner advertisements are by far the least preferred form of online advertisement with more than 96% of the respondents finding this form of advertisement irritating. Further, in a study on the use of internet advertising by the Kenyan mobile
telephone industry, Otieno (2012) established that search engine and viral advertising were the most prevalent forms of internet advertising. These forms of communication were further noted to be more intrusive compared to other means leading to prominence in the formation of negative attitudes, irritation, and impairing intentions to return to a given platform.

In the digital space, a website and its interface serve as a window through which customers encounter their initial experiences with a brand (Zhang & von Dran, 2002). The first interaction has a significant effect on all subsequent interactions between the consumer and the brand, which will further be carried out through the website's interface (Azab, 2012). Accordingly, the design elements of a website have a significant effect on customer engagement. Zhang and von Dran (2002) noted that poorly designed websites irritate their users as they impede their ability to navigate the site. Additionally, Azab (2012) argued that it is of great importance that brands understand all factors that not only stimulate positive and pleasing feelings among consumers but also the factors such as content placement and amount of irritating advertisements that arouse negative emotions and reactions among customers noting that such emotions could ultimately impede the engagement behaviour of customers. Through the application of uses and gratification theory in the context of digital communication, the irritation value of digital communication can be an important motive that influences the online engagement behaviour of millennials.

2.7  Digital Communication Touchpoints

According to Stein and Ramaseshan (2016), touchpoints are the interaction points between a brand and it customer that allow customers to engage and experience a brand’s
products or services. A brand can have various touchpoints depending on their strategy. Meyer and Schwager (2007) note that a touchpoint is a key element in a brand’s communication strategy as it allows the brand to reach out to their target audience, provide engagement and allow the brand to be seen by the prospective customer in a favourable way. The goal of an effective touch point is to create an opportunity for the customer to choose a particular brand over another.

Within the digital communication space, there are various touchpoints that a brand can utilize to engage with its customers. They include online ads, email, social media ads, blogs, website, forums, mobile apps, newsletters, and reviews among others. Most companies will identify their touchpoints based on the customer journey. According to Moon (2009) a typical customer moves through five typical stages as they interact with a brand. The stages are Awareness > Consideration > Purchase > Retention > Advocacy. Based on this model, the focus of this study will be on three key touchpoints – online ads (for awareness and consideration), website (for purchase and retention) and mobile apps (for retention/advocacy).

**Websites as a touch point.** Over the past few years, the use of websites as a primary channel of information exchange between companies and the public has grown exponentially. According to Stein (2009), there are millions of websites on the World Wide Web. The huge number is associated with the increase in the number of companies that are using the internet as a communication channel. Tarafdar and Zhang (2008) noted that the website has emerged as a primary vehicle for organizations to communicate with their various stakeholders adding that for organizations that are using the internet to
conduct their business, both commercial and non-commercial, the website is their "window to the world."

There have been various studies that have described characteristics of a website such as information quality and quantity, user trust (Gefen & Straub, 2000) user satisfaction (Muyllea, Moenaertb, & Despontin, 2004) website quality (Iwaarden, Wiele, Ball, & Millen, 2004). Some of these characteristics have been shown to influence website performance and are core to this study are users’ engagement with websites. Characteristics such as the type of content, the organization of information, the ease with which the website can be used, and technical characteristics have all been listed as some of the factors that determine the success of using websites as a communication platform. For instance, Cornelissen (2017) notes that for a website to be used successfully to communicate with the general public, the content of the information should be relevant to the purpose of the website further, Azab (2012) noted that the content should be easy to understand, current and useful. However, as noted by Flavián, Guinalíu, and Gurrea (2006), the best judge on the success of a website, in terms of quality and delivery is ultimately the customers themselves.

In operationalizing this touchpoint, two measures were used – repeat website visits and writing of online reviews. To determine website engagement performance, Armstrong and Hagel (2000) proposed the use of website loyalty where website loyalty was defined as the likelihood of repeated visits by the same individual. Further, Azab (2012) argued that website engagement can be measured by calculating the number of repeat visits that a customer has made to the website. This is a strong analytic that can be utilized to measure the effectiveness of a website in influencing the engagement behaviour of the public.
Additionally, writing an online product review is also considered as a measure of online engagement. Given that writing, both as a means of providing feedback and/or expressing satisfaction or the lack of it, is the ultimate sign of engagement as the user will need to participate and get involved in that process. Smith (2012) used this measure to uncover marketing strategies that were successful in motivating millennials to write online reviews.

**Mobile apps as a touch point.** Without a doubt, the rapid growth of digital media has transformed how individuals obtain, generate, and distribute information. Worldwide, the proliferation of smartphones has given users the ability to connect to the internet at any given time. According to Ling and Typhina (2016) this has led to an interesting trend where individuals are preferring to use Mobile Applications to access information instead of traditional websites. Salehan and Negahban (2013) note that there is a significant correlation between people who own smartphones and the preference to use dedicated mobile apps. There are various reasons that have led to the increase in mobile application usage. Key among them are the dedicated services offered by various applications and the ease of accessibility since mobile phone applications can be accessed from virtually anywhere, some without the need for a wireless hotspot or expensive and physically large pieces of hardware. Additionally, majority of the mobile applications have been created to provide faster loading times and have optimized user interfaces and other features to add to the functionality of mobile browsers (Ling & Typhina, 2016).

The increase in mobile app usage has further led to a rise in the number of mobile applications. There are virtually apps for nearly everything; from those that allow users to keep in touch with friends (e.g. Facebook, Viber, WhatsApp), share pictures (e.g. Instagram, Pinterest), music (e.g. Pandora, Shazam, Spotify), read news (e.g. Opera News,
Feedly, Flipboard, Reddit) find directions (e.g. Google Maps, Waze, Here) and much more (The Pew Research Center, 2014). As noted by Campbell, Altenhofen, Bellar, and Cho (2014), mobile apps both define and distinguish mobile phones from other digital media. From the various specialized functionalities that different mobile apps can handle, the space for user personalization, the ability to be used offline, the utilization of smartphone hardware to deliver on specific functionalities among other features have been key in differentiating mobile apps from other digital media.

Localizing this discussion, smartphone uptake in Kenya is significantly affected by its ability to offer users access to various mobile phone applications, which include social media, mobile gaming, search engines, email and video chat, which are some of the most popular applications (Zab, 2015).

As a communication touch point, Goggin (2011) noted that the development of mobile apps has added a new dimension to how brands can reach their target audience. As young adults continue to increasingly use their smartphones to consume news and other content, connect with their friends, find locations, or get local weather updates, those in need of connecting with them have an opportunity to target them. By using in-app communication, brands are starting to appreciate the opportunity that mobile apps provide for them to get in touch with their audience.

One of the key factors that influences the use of mobile apps as a communication outlet is the level of mobile app engagement. The level of engagement on a mobile app has been cited as a significant component in any mobile application’s success (Lalmas, O’Brien, & Yom-Tov, 2013). There are various ways that the level of mobile applications engagement can be measured. For instance, one can use reviews left by users, time spent
in the app (session length), frequency of use, repeat usage, exit rate among other analytics (Lalmas, 2012). Lalmas, O’Brien, and Yom-Tov (2013) however note that one of the key analytics in indicating how feasible it is to use a mobile app for communication is repeat usage. This is because the metric indicates if users are actually using an app on a regular basis rather than just downloading it. Moreover, this metric gives a baseline understanding of an app’s growth. This metric was therefore used to operationalize engagement of mobile applications in this study.

**Web banner ads as a touch point.** Online advertisement, which is used interchangeably with web advertising, is the placing of communication on a platform accessible via the internet – mainly websites and mobile application with the aim of directing users to a pre-defined website (Shah, et al., 2007). The process, which is key in creating awareness and consideration within the generation public, mainly involves three participants i.e. the advertisers, the publisher and a third-party agency. The advertiser is mainly a company, organization or individual in need of communicating a particular message to their online audience. Their message, in the form of a banner advertisement, is placed on a publisher’s platform e.g. website. The third-party agency works as a liaison between the advertiser and the publisher, their input is however not mandatory (Shah, et al., 2007). When the banner ad is placed on the publisher’s platform, a user who clicks on it is taken from the publisher’s platform to the advertisers existing webpage (Dahlen, 2001). Given that the process can be highly targeted to an audience that fits a particular demographic, and the results can be tracked, online advertisements is becoming a more preferred means of communicating with the general public (Jothi, Neelamalar, & Prasad, 2011).
According to Shah, et al (2007), the concept of online ads stemmed from subdividing a webpage into different segments that left spaces that could be used to place web banner ads. The spaces are designed to fit multimedia elements that are hyperlinked to the advertisers’ webpage. With advancement in technology, there have been different designs for banners ads that can be customized to reach a specific audience. Some banners are static; others are dynamic while others can expand into various different sizes and shapes when a user clicks on them. Additionally, there are those banners ads that pop-up as soon as the user clicks on them meaning that they cover the entire screen while other banners pop under the user’s browser meaning that the advertised page will appear on a tab behind the main web browser (Dahlen, 2001).

To operationalize this touch point, this study used click-through. Click-through-rate (CTR) is the calculation of the number of times a banner ad, displayed on a publishers’ platform has been clicked on (Geddes, 2010).

According to Lyons (2017), ad click-through is an engagement behaviour where the number of clicks that a banner ad receives is used to gauge how often users engaged with the banner ad and were redirected to the advertisers’ targeted webpage. The use of click-through as a measure of engagement for online ads has been studied over time. Geddes (2010) noted that in order to measure the success of online ads, brands needed tools to measure the click-through-rate while as Shah, et al (2007) noted that the use of click through to measure online ads engagement is widely used across the world.

2.8 Millennials and Digital Communication

This paper specifically looks at the online engagement behaviour of millennials. This generation has been described as one that possesses a lot of potential purchasing
power and brand loyalty, making them an extremely important audience that needs special attention when developing a brand’s communication strategy (Speier, 2016). As reported by various scholars (Camille & Nicole, 2011; Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Donnie & Mitch, 2014; Jacqueline, Rajesh, Sara, Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008) who have studied millennial behaviour, this cohort is not only well-educated, tech-savvy, information hungry, and ambitious but can also be impatient, with short attention spans and in need of instant gratification hence the reason for consulting online before making an in-store purchase decision.

According to Smith (2011), millennials are online every day as computers and mobile phones continue to become a commonplace tool. Factors such as the widespread internet connection, emergence of social networking platforms and the proliferation of interactive technologies have empowered this generation to be more active in the creation and advancement of products and brands communications (Smith, 2012). As highlighted by the Morris Creative Group (2017), millennials in Nairobi possess certain traits that make them an attractive segment to many brands. For instance, they have been described as multitaskers meaning they will attend to various projects at the same time. This therefore means that it is important for brands to invest in strategies that not only capture their attention but also able to retain it. Millennials in Nairobi are also tech-savvy meaning that they are captivated by various content within the digital environment, which then means that brands using digital media need to stand out if they are to be recognized by this generation.

Furthermore, Nairobi millennials have been identified as brewers and not buyers meaning that they browse more about services and products rather than buy. This means
that a brand also needs to invest heavily in strategies for converting them into actual buyers. Millennials are also advice seekers hence the reason why they will go online even when they are about to make a purchase decision inside a store. Odhiambo (2014) notes that millennials are advice seekers whereby they will consult their contacts and even strangers on the internet before making a decision. This means that brands need to invest more in building trust with their online audience. Further, millennials in Nairobi are identified as outspoken, fighting for what they believe and express their opinions. For brands these means that they can be string brand advocates if they connect with a brand.

It is from the various character traits which millennials possess that Speier (2016) asserts that in order for brands to be successful, they should align and realign their communication techniques to engage with millennials. Among features that affect the general effectiveness of a message are its entertainment value, informativeness, and level of irritation to the consumer (Luo, 2002). Additionally, in their study to establish the effect of internet advertising on Kenyan university students’ attitudes, Ogutu, Igutu and Njanja (2014) noted that their demographic characteristics such as age, gender, income level, and education had an effect on the level to which various digital communication constructs have on their online engagement behaviour.

2.9 Conceptual Framework

As noted earlier, within the digital communication field, some of the most salient gratifications/motives that influence user consumption of digital media include entertainment, informativeness and irritation. These constructs have been identified to have an effect on the online engagement behaviour of millennials. Based on the above discussion and theory constructs discussed, millennials online engagement behaviour is
influenced by the entertainment, informativeness and/or irritation of websites, mobile application or web banners ads. This concept is illustrated in the figure below:

![Conceptual Framework](image)

*Figure 2. Conceptual Framework*

### 2.10 Research Hypothesis

Based on the preceding review of the literature, the entertainment, information and irritation constructs were identified to have an effect on the online engagement behaviour of millennials (Luo, 2002). It is from this description that the study deduced that entertainment, informative and irritation components of digital communication have the potential of affecting how millennials will engage with a given brand. From the preceding review, the following hypotheses were formulated.

- **H1**- Entertaining content on websites, mobile apps and web ads leads to increased online engagement
- **H2**- Informative content on websites, mobile apps and web ads leads to increased online engagement.
• H3- Web irritation in the use of websites, mobile apps and online ads leads to increased online engagement.

2.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviews literature on the gratifications and motives that influence consumption of digital media. The first section of the study reviews how the uses and gratifications theory has developed from its initial constructs. The second section draws from various recent research to bring out the most salient constructs that influence online engagement behaviour. This is then followed by a literature review of the main touchpoints that guide this study. The conceptual framework that leads to the study’s hypothesis follows this. The next chapter presents the research methodology to be used in the study.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

This study was a quantitative research with a descriptive approach. According to Sue and Ritter (2011), a descriptive research gathers quantifiable information that can be used for statistical inference on a target audience through data analysis. This method has an advantage of being cheap and effective where large sample sizes are applicable in addition to providing an accurate and valid representation of the variables under study. Sue and Ritter (2011) observed that this survey method is best for collecting original data as it gives a high degree of accuracy. This method allowed for the collection of quantitative data, which was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

3.2 Population and Sampling Design

The study focused on the age group that covers those born between the years of 1980 and 1999, which has been identified as the millennial generation (Meister, Willyerd, & Foss, 2010). In Kenya, this cohort forms approximately 43% of the population (KNBS, 2014).

Poynter (2010) defined population as the full set of cases from which a sample is selected and consists of elements that have common characteristics and from which the researcher wants to study and generalize their findings. This study’s population was drawn from the total population of Nairobi, which stood at 3,134,798 as per the National census of 2009 (KNBS, 2014). In total, there were 38,610,097 people living in Kenya. This was the population of inference. Sue and Ritter (2011) note that the population of inference is that which the researcher ultimately intends to draw conclusions about.
**Sampling frame.** According to Sue and Ritter (2011) a sampling frame is a list of elements in the population from which the sample is drawn. The study was undertaken in Nairobi County with the sampling frame being drawn from the age groups that fall within the millennial definition (ages 20-30 and 30-40).

Table 2: *Nairobi Population*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group (Years)</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 -30</td>
<td>494,464</td>
<td>445,685</td>
<td>940,149</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 -40</td>
<td>236,679</td>
<td>317,082</td>
<td>553,761</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-18 and 41-81+</td>
<td>800,235</td>
<td>840,653</td>
<td>1,640,888</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,531,378</td>
<td>1,603,420</td>
<td>3,134,798</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Source KNBS, 2014.

3.3 **Data Collection Methods and Instrument**

The research made use of primary data that was collected using questionnaires through unrestricted, self-selected surveys. Fricker (2012) described unrestricted, self-selected surveys as surveys that are open to the public for anyone to participate in. The study’s questionnaires were created and distributed using Google Forms (an online survey development cloud-based software accessed via https://docs.google.com) to millennials in Nairobi. The questionnaire was active between the months of February – March 2018 when the data collection process was ongoing and anyone within the millennial population browsing through the internet would choose to take part in the survey.

A total of 248 people participated in the survey. To ensure that only millennials in Nairobi would participate in the survey, the questions on age and location were made compulsory on the google form with only choices of age falling within the millennial
population and choices of constituencies with Nairobi made available. This meant that those who could not fill the form at this particular point could not continue with the research. Unrestricted, self-selected surveys methodology, which is a form of convenience sampling, was selected for its usefulness in collecting web data where using probability sampling is difficult.

The online questionnaire used both close-ended -questions and agreement scale questions based on a five-point scale with steps labelled Strongly Agree, Agree, Fair, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire was distributed through the following channels – Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Email, Short Message Service (SMS) and Instagram. To ensure a higher response rate, a link to the website hosting the questionnaire was promoted on social media.

3.4 Research Procedures

A pilot test was conducted to field-test the validity of the questionnaire. Suggestions from the pre-test group were incorporated to modify confusing questions making the research instrument was relevant, logical, simple to fill and brief. The pre-test was carried out among 34 colleagues and acquaintances of the researcher who fall within the age cohort of the study. The actual research was carried out after analysing and including the feedback from the pre-test group.

A total of 27 questions were included in the questionnaire distributed to the respondents of the study. The first section of the questionnaire sought to identify the socio-demographic background of the respondents, which included gender, age group, education level, income level, place of residence and platform from which they received the questionnaire. The second part incorporated five-point Likert scale questions relating
to Entertainment Gratification, Informativeness Gratification, Irritation of the different

touch points (websites, mobile applications, online advertisements), and engagement
(repeat website visits, app usage, web banner ads click-through).

Cronbach’s alpha for each construct was calculated to test for reliability. Each
construct was found reliable where a result of 0.707, 0.860, 0.824 and 0.739 for
entertainment, informativeness, web irritation and online engagement respectively. The
informativeness construct had the least number of items on the questionnaire at five,
entertainment and web irritation each had six number of items while online engagement
had eight items.

To ensure that there was a good response rate, the researcher used the social media sites
that are popular with the respondents. Additionally, an introductory letter that served to
provide information about the researcher accompanied the questionnaires. The letter also
confirmed that the information and data obtained from the research would be confidential
and was intended for academic purposes only.

**Data analysis methods.** Once the data was received, the researcher edited the data by
checking for missing data or unfilled sections of the questionnaire and only sections
properly filled were used. After cleaning and editing of data, coding was done using the
statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 24 which is
accurate and fairly easy to use. The data were analysed using mean and mode which are
measures of central tendency. Other data analysis techniques and measures used included
range, standard deviations and variances. In addition, relationships between various
factors were tested using correlation analysis and variance analysis. The data were then
presented through tables and figures.
3.5 Ethics

The researcher ensured that he obtained clearance from USIU Graduate School. Additionally, ethical considerations of informed consent, assent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity were observed.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the methodology and procedures that were used to carry out the study. It began with an introduction underlining the general methodology and structure of the chapter. The chapter also highlighted the method that was used to conduct this research and its justification. Additionally, the population was defined, the sampling technique illustrated, and the sample size described. Finally, the data collection techniques and research procedures utilized in the study are discussed.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the presentation and interpretation of the findings obtained from the field. The chapter presents the background information of the respondents and findings of the analysis based on the objectives of the study. Both Descriptive statistics and variance analysis have been used to discuss the findings of the study.

4.1 Descriptive Data

The major purpose of the study was to determine the factors affecting online engagement behaviour of Millennials in Nairobi. The specific target population stood at 1,493,910. The dependent variable was online engagement behaviour while as the independent variables were entertainment content, informative content and web irritation. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the demographics data obtained in the study. Tabachnick and Fidell (2006) notes that descriptive statistics provide simple summaries about a study’s sample and its measures.

Respondents’ gender. The study requested respondents to indicate their gender. From the study’s findings, majority of the respondents, as shown on Figure 2, were female at 52.4% whereas 47.6% of the respondents were male. This implies that both genders were well engaged in this research and therefore the findings of this research did not suffer from gender bias.
Respondents' Gender

The study requested the respondents to indicate their age. From the research findings, the study revealed that majority of the respondents by 41.1% were aged between 26 to 29 years. As shown in Figure 3, 21% of the respondents were in the 30 to 33 years age band, 18.5% were in the 22-25 age band, 14.5% in the 18-21 age band while 4.8% were in the 34-38 age band.

Respondents' education level. The study requested the respondents to indicate their highest level of education. From the research findings, the majority of the respondent by 66.5% had Bachelor's level education, 21.8% were at Master’s level,
8.9% college level, 1.6% secondary education while 1.2% had post-doctoral level education. The fact that all the respondents were holding secondary and post-secondary school education is an indication that they were well educated and that they were in a position to respond to research questions with ease.

Respondents’ income levels. The study requested the respondents to indicate their income levels. From the research findings, 18.4% of the respondents earned at least Ksh 20,000 per month, 28.6% earned in excess of Ksh 20,000 but below 50,000, majority of the respondents 36.3% earned between 50,001 and 100,000 per month, 5.3% earned between Ksh 100,001 and 150,000, 2.4% earn between 150,000 and 200,000, while 9% earn over Ksh 200,000 per month.

Platforms used in survey. The study requested the respondents to indicate from which platform they received the survey. A majority of the respondents, 39.9%, received the survey via Whatsapp, 24.6% on Email, 19.8% on twitter 8.9% on Facebook and 6.9% on SMS. Given that Whatsapp is a popular messaging tool app among the target audience, combined with the fact that it has an inherent 100% distribution rate where a WhatsApp message reaches all recipients in a broadcast list by appearing as a notification on a smartphone, may explain why the app was the most popular platform.

![Platforms used in survey](image)

*Figure 4. Platform's Frequency*
Platform access. The study requested the respondents to indicate which among the various gadgets commonly used as a touchpoint to communicate with millennials they had access to. From the research findings, 86.3% had access to smartphones, 79.8% of the total respondents had access to laptops, 23.4% to a desktop, 19.4% to a tablet device, 13.7% had access to an iPhone, 11.3% to an iPad and 4.4% to a PlayStation. It is important to note here that these are not cumulative percentages as it is possible for a respondent to have access to multiple gadgets. The fact that all the respondents had access to at least one of these devices is an indication that they were well versed with the various web form communication and that they were in a position to understand and respond to research questions with ease.

Reliability test. In this study, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was used as a quality indicator of the scale items. According to (Coakes, Steed, & Ong, 2010), the Cronbach’s alpha is based on average correlation of items within the test. A common rule of thumb is that indicators should have a Cronbach’s alpha of at least 0.7 to judge the set of items as reliable (Peterson, 1994). The results for the reliability test are presented in Table 3 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>0.707</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informativeness</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web irritation</td>
<td>0.824</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online engagement</td>
<td>0.739</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Description: Cronbach’s alpha was calculated for each factor, and each was found reliable $a = 0.707, 0.860, 0.824$ and $0.739$ for entertainment, informativeness, web irritation and online engagement respectively.

4.2 Results According to Research Hypotheses

Entertainment and online engagement (H1). The study sought to assess how entertainment gratification in the use of websites, mobile apps and web ads affects
online engagement behaviour. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the data obtained in the study. From the research findings, majority of the respondents as shown by 56.5% would repeatedly visit a website if it was entertaining compared to 3.2% who were of a contrary opinion and 12.9% who were unsure. In regards to Mobile Apps, a majority of the respondents 38.7% indicated that they would continually use a mobile application if it were entertaining compared to 9.3% who indicated that the entertainment level does not affect their continued use of a mobile app while 14.9% were unsure. In regards to online ads, the overwhelming majority of the respondents 81.9% indicated the visual design of an online ad affects how often they would click on the ads. Only 2.4% of the respondents were neutral.

Table 4: Statements Relating to Entertainment and Online Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I visit a website more than once if it is entertaining</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The entertainment level in a mobile app affects my continued use of the application</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The visual design of an online advert affects how often I click on it</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, majority of the respondents, 80%, 65.3% and 97.2% agreed that entertaining content in websites, mobile apps and online ads respectively increases their engagement with the said platforms. To further establish whether entertaining content and online engagement were related, the Pearson's r correlation analysis was conducted. From the correlation coefficient computed to assess the relationship between entertaining content and the online engagement behaviour, there was a positive correlation between the two variables, $r = 0.985$, $n = 248$, $p = 0.002$. Overall, there was a strong, positive correlation between entertaining content on websites, mobile apps and web ads and online
engagement. The results mean that an increase in entertaining content is correlated with increases in online engagement. These results support the first hypothesis.

H1 - Entertaining content on websites, mobile apps and web ads leads to increased online engagement – supported.

**Information and online engagement (H2).** The study also sought to assess how entertainment gratification in the use of websites, mobile apps and web ads affects online engagement behaviour. Descriptive statistics from the research findings show that majority of the respondents, 53.2% would repeatedly visit a website if it had new information compared to 0.8% who were of a contrary opinion and 22.2% who were neutral. In regards to Mobile Apps, a majority of the respondents 37.1% indicated that they would continue using a mobile app if it had new information, 17.7% were neutral while 0.8% were of the opinion that new information does not affect their continued use of a mobile app. With the online ads, 38.7% of the respondents strongly felt that information available on an online banner affects how often they click on them, 7.3% were of a contrary opinion.

**Table 5: Statements Relating to Information and Online Engagement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New information on a website will affect how often I visit it</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of new information in a mobile app affects my continued use of the application</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of information on an online advert affects how often I click on it</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, majority of the respondents, 73%, 71.8% and 83.5% agreed that informative content in websites, mobile apps, and online ads respectively increases their engagement with the said platforms.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between information and online engagement. There was a positive correlation between the two variables, \( r = 0.865 \), \( n = 248 \), \( p = 0.003 \). Overall, there was a strong, positive correlation between informative content on websites, mobile application, online web banners and online engagement. The results indicate that an increase in the amount of informative content on the various digital communication platforms leads to an increase in the level of online engagement. These results support the second hypothesis.

H2 - Informative content on websites, mobile apps and web ads leads to increased online engagement – supported.

Irritation and online engagement (H3). The study’s other objective was to assess how web irritation in the use of websites, mobile apps and web ads affects online engagement behaviour. Analysis of the descriptive statistics from the research findings indicated that majority of the respondents, 33.5 % strongly agreed that the number of advertisements on a website affects how often they visit a website compared to 9.7 % of the respondents who indicated that the number of advertisements on a website does not affect their continued use of a website. In regards to mobile Apps, a majority of the respondents, 52% indicated that the number of advertisements in a mobile app strongly affects their continued use of the application; none of the respondents had a contrary opinion suggesting that irritation is a key factor in mobile app usage. In regards to online ads, 29.8% of the respondents strongly agreed that the number of times an online ad appears would affect how often they would engage with the ad, 17.3% were neutral while 5.6% were of a contrary opinion. Overall, majority of the respondents, 60.5%
indicated that the number of advertisements on a website affects how often they visit a website meaning that the more the advertisements on a website, the less the number of repeat website and thus less engagement. Similarly, majority of the respondents, 75.8% and 66.9% indicated that they would not engage with mobile apps and online ads that they found irritating.

Table 6: Statements Relating to Irritation and Online Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of advertisements on a website affects how often I visit/use the site</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of advertisements in a mobile app affects my continued use of the application.</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of times an online advert appears affects how often I click on it</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between web irritation and online engagement. There was a negative correlation between the two variables, $r = -0.635$, $n = 248$, $p = 0.005$. The results indicate that an increase in the amount of web irritation with the various digital communication platforms leads to a decrease in the level of online engagement. These findings corroborate the notion that the higher the web irritation, the lower the online engagements. This result does not support the third hypothesis. H3 - Web irritation in the use of websites, mobile apps and online ads leads to increased online engagement – not supported.

Whilst the study confirmed that entertainment, informativeness, and irritation gratifications had a significant influence on user engagement, there is need for further
investigation on how respondents’ demographics influenced the engagement level. This is discussed in the factors influencing online engagement section 4.3

4.3 Factors Influencing Online Engagement

Gender and online engagement. An independent-sample $t$-test was conducted to compare the online engagement behaviour of men and women. Tabachnick and Fidell (2006) note that the $t$-test is a statistical test that makes assumptions about the defining properties of the population distribution from which one’s data are drawn. This method was selected as it was deemed most appropriate in comparing the means of two independent groups in order to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different.

From the research finding, there was a significant difference in the scores for men ($M=2.0$, $SD=0.43$) and women ($M=1.9$, $SD=0.47$) conditions; $t(246)=2.11$, $p=0.036$. These results suggest that gender has influenced the level of online engagement among millennials in Nairobi. Specifically, this study’s results suggest that, overall; men have a higher level of engagement compared to women.

Age and online engagement. A one-way ANOVA between subjects’ was conducted to compare the online engagement behaviour of respondents among the various age groups 18 to 21, 22 to 25, 26 to 29, 30 to 33 and 34 to 38. Tabachnick and Fidell (2006) note that the one the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) is useful in determining whether there are any statistically significant differences between the means of more than two groups.

From the research finding, there was a significant effect of age on the level of engagement at the $p<.05$ level for the three conditions [$F(4, 243) = 5.71$, $p = 0.000$]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for respondents aged 18 to 21 (($M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.37$) was significantly higher compared
to the rest of the age groups. Respondents within the age groups 22 to 25, (M = 1.91, SD = 0.49), 26 to 29, (M = 1.92, SD = 0.47) and 34 to 38 ((M = 1.92, SD = 0.42) did not have a significantly difference. Taken together, these results suggest that age has an effect on online engagement. Specifically, these results suggest that those aged 18-21 are more likely to be active online as compared to the other age groups.

**Figure 5.** Comparison of age and online engagement behaviour

**Education level and online engagement.** A one-way between subjects’ ANOVA was conducted to compare the online engagement behaviour of respondents with the secondary, college, bachelors, masters and doctorate education levels. There was no statistically significant effect of education level on the level of engagement at the p<.05 level for the five conditions [F (4, 243) = 1.07, p = 0.371]. These results suggest that education level has no significant effect on the level of online engagement among millennials in Nairobi.

**Level of income and online engagement.** A one-way ANOVA between subjects was conducted to compare the online engagement behaviour of respondents between the various income level brackets. There was a significant effect of income on the level of engagement at the p<.05 level for the selected six conditions [F (5, 239) =
5.71, \( p = 0.001 \)]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for respondents earning between 0-20,000 (\( M = 2.12, SD = 0.53 \)); 150,001 to 200,000 (\( M = 2.26, SD = 0.91 \)) and over 200,000 (\( M = 2.02, SD = 0.31 \)); was higher compared to those earning between 20,001-50,000 (\( M = 1.93, SD = 0.44 \)); 50,001 to 100,000 (\( M = 1.80, SD = 0.43 \)); and 100,001 to 150,000 (\( M = 1.83, SD = 0.45 \)).

These results suggest that income level has an effect on online engagement. Specifically, these results suggest that those earning between Ksh 150,001 to 200,000 are more likely to be active online as compared to those earning between 50,001 to 100,000.

![Figure 6. Comparison of income and online engagement behaviour](image)

**4.4 Factors Affecting how Often People Click on Web Banners**

Web banner ads, in particular pop-up ads, were of interest in the study as they had been identified as not only one of the most commonly used means of communicating with millennials but also one that was most intrusive (McCoy, Everard, Polak, & Galletta, 2008). The research findings show that a majority of the respondents, 75% find large pop-up ads irritating compared to 1.6% who were of a contrary idea and 7.7% who were neutral. These results mirror results from Winsauer (2016) who reported that pop-up ads have a 73% disapproval rating.
Of interest to the study was how the entertainment, information and irritation gratification of pop-up ads influenced online engagement in terms of click through. From the research findings, a majority of the respondents represented by 40.3% strongly disagreed that they would click on a large pop-up ad if it had new information. Only 11.3% indicated that they would. Similarly, a majority of the respondents strongly disagreed that they would click on a large pop-up ad if it were entertaining. However, a close 27% strongly agreed that they would click on a large pop-up ad if it were entertaining.

A correlation analysis of the three factors was conducted to establish the most salient gratification. From the analysis, there exists no correlation between online ads irritation and informative content engagement. However, there exists a correlation between online ads irritation and entertaining content engagement (p= .087, r= .170). This analysis means there is a tendency for people to click on entertaining large pop-up ads even though they are irritating. This is however not the case with informative large pop-up ads.

4.5 Chapter Summary

The chapter presented the results of the survey where 248 millennials in Nairobi participated in the study. The data obtained from the survey were analysed using descriptive statistics; frequency, percentage and correlation. The presentation of the findings is thematically done by description, tables and figures. The study finds are; most respondents will repeatedly visit a website, use mobile apps and click on online ads if they are entertaining; most respondents will visit a website, use mobile apps and click on online ads if they are informative; most respondents would keep off websites and mobile application that are irritating. None of the respondents would click on an
online ad that is not visually appealing. The next chapter discusses the major findings of the study, major conclusions drawn and areas for further research.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

From the analysis and data collected, the following discussions, conclusion and recommendations were made. The responses were based on the objectives of the study, which were to assess how entertainment, information and irritation in the use of website, mobile application and online advertisements affect the online engagement behaviour of millennials living in Nairobi.

5.1 Discussion

Entertainment and online engagement (H1). The study established that the majority of millennials as shown by 80%, 65.3% and 97.2% (indicate Table or Figure number) of the respondents would visit a website repeatedly, use mobile apps more than once and click on online ads respectively if these platforms were able to provide gratifying entertainment content to them.

These findings parallel the work of Ducoffe (1996), Lim (2013), Park et al. (2009), and Sledgianowski and Kulviwat (2009) who assert that entertainment gratification is a major determinant of online engagement behaviour. Given that entertainment on the web provides an opportunity for people to among other things distract and divert themselves, get some aesthetic enjoyment and emotional release, Tarafdar and Zhang (2008) reveal that having entertaining content with visually appealing design on a website or mobile app alongside a banner advert can lead to an increase in online engagement.

Information and online engagement (H2). The study indicated that a vast majority of millennials in Nairobi would engage more on websites, mobile apps and banners ads that have informative content. The tendency to repeatedly visit a website,
continually use a mobile application and click on a banner ad that is informative is because consumers perceive communication on these platforms provide information that is gratifying. This is in line with Leung and Wei’s (2000) assertion that the most important reason why people go online is to gather information. To consumers therefore, the degree to which a website, mobile application or web banner is informatively gratifying strongly influences their willingness to revisit, reuse, or click on a banner. If a website, mobile application and online banner is able to fulfil the informational need that the consumer has, it is more likely that they will engage with the content. This is in line with the findings by (Barkhi et al., 2008; Bauer & Greyser, 1968; Chen & Wells, 1999; Ducoffe, 1995; Haq, 2009; Luo, 2002; Maddox, 1998; Siau & Shen, 2003).

Given this orientation, digital communicators are advised to ensure that quality information, which is up to date, is incorporated on their website, mobile apps, and online ads before releasing it to the millennial cohort in order to enhance engagement. The information should be useful, relevant to its intended consumers, and able to enhance their browsing experience as well as satisfy their information thirst. David and Michael (2014) whose work had pointed out the importance of interactive media, such as the mobile application as an information broker that allows customers to acquire real-time information that was previously not available, support this.

Notably, communicators using online platforms should ensure that the uploaded information is relevant, accurate, and constantly updated to ensure timeliness. The amount of information, its arrangement, and placement are very crucial as these elements have a direct influence on the consumer’s ability to easily consume and thus engage with the content provided.
Interestingly however, there were respondents who indicated that information would not affect their engagement on the selected platforms. This indicates that there are other underlying factors, other than information, that would trigger the respondents to visit a website more than once, use an app continually or click on a web banner.

**Irritation and online engagement (H3).** The majority of the respondents in this study showed an inclination towards avoiding websites, mobile applications, and web banner ads that were perceived to be irritating. This is consistent with previous research where irritation was identified as having a negative effect on the level of online engagement (Baek & Morimoto, 2012).

Type of content and execution strategy are the main reasons behind irritation and thus poor online engagement. For instance, if an ad pops up too many times, the content is exaggerated or when too many ads appear all at once, consumers are likely to feel irritated. Irritation will then lead to avoidance and/or brand attrition. Irritation will mainly occur when communication that the user is exposed to gets in conflict with their cognitive tasks. When this happens, users’ first reaction is to try to regain control over their experience and will most probably find ways to ignore or block the irritating messages. To consumers, the degree to which the communication material on an online platform is perceived to be irritating strongly influences their level of engagement. For instance, large pop-up ads that cover the entire screen were found to be irritating with majority of the respondents indicating that they would not click on them.

As noted by Luo (2002) communicators who irritate their audience by having numerous, too big, or weirdly placed communication materials will find it notoriously difficult to get consumers back to their websites in the future. Notably, irritation is a phenomenon that is similar to reactance, that is, consumers tend to refuse visiting a site if they have the feeling that the site is too intrusive (Baek & Morimoto, 2012).
suggests that the number of advertisements, size, placement, and nature of communication materials used on a website, mobile app, and banner ad have a significant influence on consumers’ irritation level and thus affecting their engagement on online platforms. As such, digital communicators should consider not placing interruptive ads such as pop-ups on their websites and mobile apps.

Mirroring the thoughts of Zhang and von Dran (2002), this study notes that the decrease in engagement, which results from communication that is viewed as intrusive and interruptive, can somewhat be decreased if the ads are relevant to the target audiences and if they provide value to the recipient. For instance, despite 87.1% of the respondents indicating that large pop-up ads are irritating, a significant number of them indicated that they would click on a banner ad if it was entertaining (45.5%) or informative (29%).

5.2 Factors Affecting Online Engagement Among Millennials

The study found that the entertainment gratification, information gratification, and web irritation have an impact on the online engagement behaviour of millennials living in Nairobi. Both entertainment gratification and information gratification were found to have a positive influence on online engagement while web irritation was found to reduce the level of online engagement. Further, the research identified that the extent to which these factors have an influence on online engagement behaviour was influenced by gender, age, income level but not education level.

With regards to gender, this study found that men were more engaging online as compared to their female counterparts. This is similar to findings from studies by Rodgers and Harris (2003) and Teo and Lim (2004). A plausible explanation for these results may be based on the difference in browsing behaviours in terms of preference for online use or attitudes toward computers and the internet. As noted by Rodgers and
Harris (2003) men have a specific motive when browsing the internet. They will therefore revisit a website, use a mobile app continuously, or click on an online advert that gratifies their particular need. This revelation concurs with Krasnova, Veltri, Eling, and Buxmann (2017) results who observed that men base their continuance use of a digital communication platform on their ability to gain entertainment or information of a general nature while women are mainly driven by relational uses, such as maintaining close ties and getting access to social information on close and distant networks.

This study further revealed that the younger respondents i.e. those between 18 and 21 years, were engaging more online compared to other age groups. Majority of users within this age range have access to or own a smart phone and are keen users of the internet. Smartphones give members of this cohort various possibilities for online engagement. For instance, many young people have smartphones that can support a range of mobile apps that could be used for various purposes. Additionally, Kinyanjui (2011) noted that almost half of young people access the web via their mobile phones. This means that not only do young people have access to the internet but they also spend a considerable amount of time online. This study’s findings imply that special attention and deliberate cues needed to be employed while communicating with various age groups especially the 30-33 age group, which had the lowest engagement, in order to increase the chances for engagement.

The study further indicated that those earning between Ksh 150,000-200,000 were more engaging online compared to the rest of the respondnet. Prior literature on the influence of income on online engagement behaviour has produced conflicting results. For instance, Shiu and Dawson (2004) indicated that there was no significant difference in online engagement among different income groups. However, Akman and Mohammad (2010) reported that higher income earning respondents were more likely
to engage online than lower income earning respondents. Interestingly, this study did not result in a linear relationship between income level and online engagement but rather indicated that those earning between Ksh 50,001 and 100,000 were the least engaging. This maybe because online engagement, which requires use of internet therefore a budgetary consideration,, is a balancing act between availability of finances and time.

The study’s findings indicated that the respondents’ education level did not have an influence on the engagement behaviour of millennials in Nairobi. A plausible explanation for this result is that respondents, having similar social backgrounds and being exposed to similar online content, are likely to interpret information from a similar angle and thus exhibiting similar online behaviour. There is however a need for further research to understand the magnitude to which education affects online engagement behaviour.

5.3 Recommendations for Practice:

With technology being part of consumers’ everyday lives, brands must evolve and develop a digital customer engagement strategy to successfully reach their consumers - especially millennials.

As much as social networks offer a unique opportunity for authentically engaging with consumers, it is key to align the customer engagement strategy with different channels such as websites, mobile applications, and online banners so that audiences can foster meaningful interactions and have positive brand experiences.

From the study findings, millennials are excited to engage with brands that are less intrusive but entertaining while providing relevant information. From these findings, the study proposes several recommendations.
First, brands should incorporate entertaining content on their websites and mobile apps alongside incorporating entertaining visual designs on a web banner ads in order to increase their audience’s online engagement. This means having content that is visually appealing and is creatively designed, draws consumers’ attention.

Secondly, brands should also fulfill the informational need that the consumer has if they are to engage with them. This means that brands making use of online platforms should ensure that they upload timely information that is accurate and relevant to the consumer. Of key importance is to consider the amount of information, its arrangement, and placement on a website, mobile application and web banner ads. This is because it has a direct influence on the consumer’s ability to easily consume and thus engage with the content provided.

Thirdly, brands should invest in strategies of personalizing their online communication content in order to decrease irritation and perceived intrusiveness of their message. Key in achieving this lies in the timing and placement of???

Overall, results of this study show that in order to stay competitive and relevant within the digital communication front, brands need to have a clear understanding of the consumer as they possess different traits that influence their online engagement behaviour. Therefore, these findings are useful and beneficial to brands as they will serve as guidelines for developing online engagement strategies and tactics. Additionally, the study’s findings are inherently clear that millennials loathe brands whose use of digital media is intrusive, confusing, distracting and even messy. Given that the ultimate goal for using digital media is to ensure that brands capture the attention of millennials and lead to intended behaviour, these findings will help brand managers, marketers,
agencies, among others who are involved in creating digital communication messages to create more engaging communication materials.

5.4 Recommendations for Policy Makers and Regulators

Without a doubt the increase in internet penetration in Kenya alongside the proliferation of smartphone usage within the country has created new opportunities for various stakeholders to engage with consumers. Statistics from the Communications Authority of Kenya (2017), show that total internet subscriptions stood at 29.6 million in July 2017 which is more than 50% of the country’s total population. The huge penetration is attributed to increased use of mobile data services, affordable internet tariffs, and the continued decrease in the price of smartphones. The increase in internet penetration calls for proper infrastructure to be put in place to cater for current and future consumer demands. Additionally, there are concerns about privacy especially with the increase in data phishing to uncover patterns in consumer behaviour. Adoption of laws restricting what companies can do with people's online data would be beneficial in protecting online users.

Moreover, with the increase in internet penetration, there has been an increase in the level of internet advertising expenditure in Kenya (Kinyanjui, 2011). Various agencies and corporates are in a competition to gain a significant share of the market. This has led to an increase in the number of online adverts, which in turn has led to significant concerns about intrusion among users with many finding them irritating. There may be need therefore for policy makers and regulators to put in place appropriate policies and legislation to protect consumers. A review of the current ICT policy developed in 2006 is therefore necessary given the fast evolving internet environment.
5.5 Implications, Limitations and Recommendation for Further Studies

Based on the Uses and Gratifications structure, this study has investigated the factors that influence repeat website visits, repeat mobile usage, and increased clicks on banners as forms of online engagement. This study sought to address the influence of entertainment, information and irritation on engagement behaviour of millennials in Nairobi, Kenya. A gap determined from extant literature.

With internet penetration on the rise in the country, understanding the dynamics that influence user engagement is crucial. Findings from this study indicate that users would like to engage with communication material that is entertaining, informative, and less irritating. This study therefore contributes significantly to the existing literature as the majority of previous empirical studies that were based in other contexts other than Kenya’s. It thus expands the body of knowledge in this particular field. In addition, knowledge from this study can be utilized by firms as they target consumers in Kenya including new entrants in online marketing in the country.

This study had its limitations. For starters, it was a one-time engagement study. There is need for continued research to repeatedly test the factors identified in this study as influencing online engagement behaviour. This will help to understand if in a longitudinal study of the factors influencing online engagement holds true and consistent with those from this research. This will also determine whether these findings can be replicated. Additionally, this study was based on respondents from Nairobi County. The use of respondents from one county out of 47 counties may limit the generalizability of the findings. A scale up to other counties would give a national outlook of the millennial consumer engagement behaviour towards online communication.
Thirdly, this study explored only three engagement factors (entertainment, information, and irritation) that were found prevalent from extant literature. Future research should explore more online engagement factors such as interactivity, credibility, etc.

Finally, this study concentrated on three key digital communication platforms, that is, websites, mobile applications, and web banner ads. Future research can further evaluate and analyse the uses and gratifications structure from a larger perspective by examining the structure from different digital communication platforms.

5.6 Conclusion

This study has contributed to the evolving body of literature on the internet’s uses and gratification particularly with regards to online engagement behaviour. The study sought to establish the relationship between entertainment gratification, information gratification, and web irritation towards online engagement. All the respondents seemed to agree on engagement being key in the success of any online communication. This is especially true because currently, users have various brands speaking to them at the same time therefore standing out becomes very important.

Effective user engagement means success in terms of reach and even revenue, as engaged users respond positively to a communication’s call to action. As Dolan, Conduit, and Fahy (2015) explained, the importance of engagement can be viewed through the eyes of a conversation. If conversation one is having with you is boring, you will most likely find someone else to talk to.

Findings from this study indicate that the level of entertainment, informativeness, and irritation on a website, mobile app, or banner ad are key factors in motivating repeat visits to a website, repeat mobile app usage, as well as increased click-trough’s on web banners. Furthermore, the results highlight the importance of
incorporating more entertaining and informative content on websites, mobile apps, and online ads while reducing irritation in order to increase online engagement. Within this study, entertaining content was found to have a significant effect in increasing online engagement on all levels – repeat website visits, repeat app usage, and clicks on online ads. Information enriched with entertaining elements is typically positively evaluated by recipients and leads to a higher intent to revisit a web site, reuse a mobile app, and click on a web banner than does information without entertainment features.

Additionally, the research showed that having non-intrusive online communication, can reduce web irritation by offering consumers a seamless online experience and which in turn increases online engagement.

As a whole, findings from the current study provide a significant contribution in understanding the influence of the uses and gratifications structure on consumer behaviour towards online communication. Thoughts on the factors identified should propel increased adoption and attractiveness to use the selected platforms to engage with the millennial cohort. As the results from this study suggest, millennials in Nairobi need to be provided with online content that is entertaining, informative, and free from irritation.
REFERENCES


65


67


APPENDICES

Appendix 1: USIU-A Institutional Review Board Approval

20th July, 2014

Kenneth Mburu
School of Communication, Cinematics & Creative Arts

Project Title: Assessing Influence of Select Digital Communication Touchpoints on the Online Engagement Behavior of Millennials in Nairobi, Kenya

Dear Mburu,

Thank you for submitting your application for exemption to the USIU-Africa Institutional Review Board (USIU-A IRB). The IRB appreciates your work in compiling the proposal. Your proposal was evaluated in light of the policies that govern the protection of human subjects.

The IRB has determined that your proposed project employs surveys that pose no more than minimal risk to the participants. The information will be obtained in such a way that one’s responses will not be linked to one’s identity or identifying information. For these reasons, the USIU-A IRB has determined that your proposed study is exempt from further IRB review.

Even though your project is exempt from IRB review, the research must be conducted according to the proposal submitted to the USIU-A IRB. Any changes to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please be aware that changes to the research protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exempt review and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the USIU-A IRB.

Should you or study participants have any questions regarding IRB’s consideration of this project, please contact irb@usiuc.ac.ke.

Sincerely,

Dr. Davary Sikalileh,
Chair IRB, USIU-Africa
sikalileh@usiuc.ac.ke
Office 0730 116 112

CC: Research Office

United States International University-Africa

USIU-A Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Appendix 2: NACOSTI Approval

Ref: No NACOSTI/P/18/63657/24600

5th September, 2018

Kenneth Kamau Mburu
United States International University
P.O. Box 14634-00800
NAIROBI.

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

Following your application for authority to carry out research on “Assessing influence of select digital communication touchpoints on the online engagement behavior of millennials in Nairobi,” I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in Nairobi County for the period ending 5th September 2019.

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

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

GODFREY P. KALERWA MSc., MBA, MKIM
FOR: DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CEO

Copy to:

The County Commissioner
Nairobi County.

The County Director of Education
Nairobi County.
Appendix 3: Informed Consent Forms

Dear Respondent,

I am a communication student seeking to understand the influence of digital communication on online engagement. You are invited to take part in the research project. Your participation will require at most 5 minutes.

Kindly note that taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose not to be in the study, you can withdraw at any time. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential. Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified.

If you have questions or want a copy or summary of this study’s results, you can contact me via kkmburu@usiu.ac.ke.

I look forward to your support.

K. K. Mburu

School of Communication, Creative and Cinematic Arts (SCCCA), United States International University- Africa.
Appendix 4: Data Collection Instrument- Sample Questionnaire

ASSESSING ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

SECTION A GENERAL INFORMATION

Gender *

○ Male

○ Female

Select the age group to which you belong *

○ 18 to 21

○ 22 to 25

○ 26 to 30

○ 30 to 33

○ 34 to 38

Kindly indicate the highest level of education attained *

○ Secondary education

○ Some college education

○ Bachelor’s or equivalent level

○ Master’s or equivalent level

○ Doctoral or equivalent level

○ Post Doctoral or equivalent

○ Other..
Kindly indicate your income level

○ Kes 0-20,000 per month

○ Kes 20,001 - 50,000 per month

○ Kes 50,001 - 100,000 per month

○ Kes 100,001-150,000 per month

○ Kes 150,000-200,000 per month

○ Over Kes 200,001 per month

Kindly indicate your residence within Nairobi County

○ Westlands

○ Dagoretti North

○ Dagoretti South

○ Langata

○ Kibra

○ Roysambu

○ Kasarani

○ Ruiru

○ Embakasi South

○ Embakasi North

○ Embakasi Central

○ Embakasi East

○ Embakasi West

○ Makadara

○ Kariobangi

○ Starehe

○ Mathare
Kindly indicate where you received this survey

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Whatsapp
- Email
- SMS
- Instagram
- Other...

Section B: INFLUENCE OF ONLINE ADS ON ONLINE ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOR

Description (optional)

Do you have access to or own (Tick all appropriate answers):

- Laptop
- Smartphone
- Ipad
- Iphone
- Tablet
- Desktop
- PSPs
Please select the most appropriate response you agree with for each of the following statements

Where:
1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neutral
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

The visual design of an online advert affects how often I click on it *

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

The amount of information on an online advert affects how often I click on it *

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

Online advertisement placement is important in drawing my attention *

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

The size of an online advertisement is important in drawing my attention *

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

The number of times an online advert appears affects how often I click on it *

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree
I find large pop up ads (that cover entire screen) irritating *

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<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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I will click on a large pop up ad (cover entire screen) if it has new information *

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<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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I will click on a large pop up ad (cover entire screen) if it is entertaining *

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Section C: INFLUENCE OF WEBSITE ON ONLINE ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOR

Description (optional)

How often do you write online review? *

- [ ] All the time.
- [ ] Often, if I am satisfied by the product/service offered.
- [ ] Sometimes, if I am not satisfied by the product/service offered.
- [ ] Never

Please select the most appropriate response you agree with for each of the following statements
The number of advertisements on a website affects how often I visit/use the site.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree (the more the ads, the less I visit)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>Strongly Disagree (Number of ads does not affect how often I visit it)</th>
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The design structure of a website affects how often I visit it.

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<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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I visit a website more than once if it is entertaining.

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New information on a website will affect how often I visit it.

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<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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Section D: Influence of Mobile Apps on Online Engagement Behavior

Where:
1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neutral
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree
I regularly use mobile applications *

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Strongly Agree

The amount of new information in a mobile app affects my continued use of the application.

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Strongly Agree

The usefulness of a mobile app affects my continued use of the application?

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Strongly Agree

The number of advertisements in a mobile app affects my continued use of the application.

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Strongly Agree

The entertainment level in a mobile app affects my continued use of the application?

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Strongly Agree

Ease of use of a mobile app affects my continued use of the application. *

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Strongly Agree

The visual design of a mobile application will affect how often I use it *

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Strongly Agree

Thank you very much for your valuable input.
Appendix 5: Nairobi County Map – Study Area

Appendix 6: Study Timeline

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<td>Proposal writing and preparation</td>
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## Appendix 7: Project Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Total (KES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IBM SPSS Statistics Grad Pack 24.0</td>
<td>USD $35.95/Month for 6 Months</td>
<td>KES 3,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Access- for Data Collection -Content Analysis</td>
<td>KES 2,500 per month- 4 months</td>
<td>KES, 10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stationery costs</td>
<td>KES 1,500 per month for three months</td>
<td>KES 12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NACOSTI Approval</td>
<td>NACOSTI Clearance certificate</td>
<td>KES 1,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Costs</td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>KES 6,000</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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