EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
WHAT ARE STUDENTS' ONLINE PERCEPTIONS AND CONCERNS ON TERTIARY EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA?

ESSA AND QUILT.AI | MARCH 2021

Background

As of 2017, sub-Saharan Africa had 9 million post-secondary students. As educational attainment grows, so too, will the qualified numbers of [African youth seeking](#) higher education. By 2027, sub-Saharan Africa will move from 3% of the world's population in 2007 to 7% in 2027.

Reaching the goal of university education and, subsequently, employment in the job market, comes with a set of challenges and barriers for students in the sub-Saharan Africa context. Some of these include the lack of scholarships, affordability of university education, limited opportunities to upskill during university, sporadic guidance on transitioning into the employment space and a sparse job market since the pandemic.

Alongside these challenges, a set of enablers exist as well, depending on the country context. Considering this background, Quilt.AI and Education Sub Sharan Africa (ESSA) sought to understand the barriers and enablers for tertiary education, scholarship acquisition and transition to employment in the online space for Kenya, Ghana, Uganda and Zambia.

What did we do

- Analyzed 2000 social media posts from Facebook, Twitter and Instagram on each key issue across the Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Ghana to understand the nature of the conversations taking place on social media in each country.

- Summarized platform insights highlighting top interests and social media pages the students engage with in the respective countries.

- Gathered data from Google Search on key issues (education, scholarships and jobs) in order to understand the level of interest towards each issue throughout the counties over a one year period (Jan 2020 - Dec 2020).

- 5000 unique keywords were extracted in total across the 4 countries for each issue. A total of 300,000 unique searches were obtained across the four countries on both issues. Rate of change was calculated by comparing the first half of the 12 months (Jan 20 - Jun 20) to the second half (Jul 20 - Dec 20). Searches were categorized into **awareness, knowledge and intent related searches for education and jobs.** Awareness reflects initial curiosity about a subject area, knowledge shows the desire to attain more advanced knowledge about a subject area and intent demonstrates an action the online user is thinking of taking.

- Key Recommendations include targeted suggestions for policymakers, civil society actors and educators.

Study Overview

ESSA and Quilt.AI's research analyzed the digital ecosystems of students in Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Ghana to answer the following questions - ***what are enablers and barriers to tertiary education, scholarships, and job applications? What are students expressing on these topics on social media platforms and in their search behaviour?***

Findings are crucial to informing policmakers, civil society actors and educators on their communication cues to help students transition successfully from university into the workforce.

Mapping a Student's Journey

APPLICATION FOR SCHOLARSHIP

Barriers:
- Limited availability
- Dependant on academic performance

Enablers:
- More private organisations offering scholarships

GRADUATE FROM UNIVERSITY: JOB HUNT

Barriers:
- Lacking practical job skills
- Limited availability
- Higher entry requirement

Enablers:
- Organisations providing job skills training, entry level jobs for graduates

GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL : UNIVERSITY APPLICATION

Barriers:
- High university fees
- Limited educational resources

Enablers:
- Learning courses providing students with expertise and opportunities to apply for overseas universities

SEARCHING FOR INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Barriers:
- Lacking practical job skills
- Limited availability

Enablers:
- Various skills training courses for students

ESSA

Similarities and differences across countries

Higher education is unaffordable

Across all countries, except for Zambia, both male and female students expressed how university education is too expensive. Finding scholarship application processes too complicated, many ask for funds online from local donors. Some online discussion also requests local level government to remove student debt and hire more local teachers.

Lack of awareness around scholarships

There is a lack of awareness about the types of scholarships available. In some contexts, there is an abundance of overseas scholarships, but not local ones (Uganda), in others there are many scholarships but not enough knowledge on how to access them (Zambia and Kenya) and in all four there is a dearth of knowledge and online information about scholarships that specifically address the needs of vulnerable populations, such as girls from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Similarities and differences across countries

Desire to find multiple opportunities to upskill and reskill

Since the pandemic, there is a recognition that there is an importance to reskill and upskill if university students want to find jobs. In Kenya and Uganda, there is not as much diversity and selection in the types of traineeships, internships and online guidance provided, as is visible in Ghana and Uganda. In Ghana, social media platforms have become an active space for job hunting, career guidance and skills acquisition for interviewing and CV writing. In Zambia, private institutions offer upskilling courses at a higher rate, than is visible in the online ecosystem for other countries.

Frustration around lack of jobs post-pandemic

In all countries, except for Zambia, students and young people looking for jobs express frustration towards the government and the lack of job opportunities in their country context. In Kenya and Uganda sentiments are especially strong, mentioning the pandemic impact and policy level inaction.

How are students talking about these issues

Higher education is unaffordable

Assalamualaikum warahmatullah wabarakaatuh
I'm a high school graduate with love and passion to become a pilot but my parents cannot **afford** the cost of my pilot training. Do you have any **scholarships** for needy and brilliant students to be trained as pilots?

I hope one day you help me because am looking for sponsor to help me with my **University** fee.i grew up with my single mom whose a peasant farmer and she can't **afford** my fee .

I got half bursary of the tuition.
Help me

I am Robinson mwanza from Kenya a student from friends **college** kaimosi of research and technology. I have been facing a challenge in my education with school fees and I plead a **scholarship** who will support me in my education. For more information call/WhatsApp 0759946464

......I would like to apply for funds that would enable continue with my **education** at college...level...

Lack of awareness around scholarships

The virtual fair is being hosted by Univer you can search, select and secure your **university** place all on our platform With over 150 **universities** in MENA and across the world you can make your application, receive your offers and confirm your choice on one dashboard personal..

Sharz - Borderless Study Consults @SharzConsu... · Mar 16, 2020
Want to study in the most prestigious **universities** in the USA?

We will help you identify the best **university** of your choice. Start your **application** with no SATs required. **Application** deadline coming soon so get in touch now to kickstart your **application**.
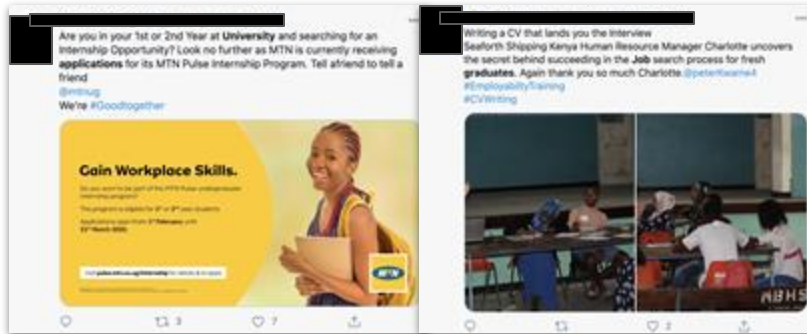
#StudyAbroadWithSharz

@vickybeeching Hello friend, am Sammy Muga, from Kenya, studying at Masinde Muliro **university**.below is my identity card and school documents..am requesting anyone to assist me .am a needy study and so I can't **afford** to complete my school fees. 0720012695 is my contact.
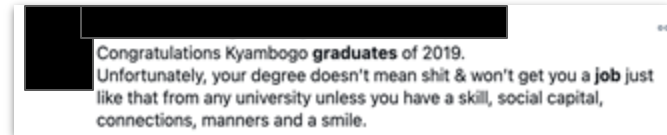
How are students talking about these issues

Desire to find multiple opportunities to upskill and reskill

I recently finished my digital marketing **internship** via the hnginternships and I am looking to further strengthen my skills. So if you know any organization currently taking on digital marketers whether via **internships**, remote or full time help get the job.

💬 1   🔁 20   ♡ 32   ↑

I'm a graduate of Law, awaiting Nigerian law school in 2021. I'm practically doing nothing throughout this year, so I would gladly appreciate if I am considered for **internship** opportunities and freelance writing as well as teaching young pupils. Thanks in advance.

💬 9   🔁 74   ♡ 82   ↑

Frustration around lack of jobs post-pandemic

Congratulations Kyambogo **graduates** of 2019.
Unfortunately, your degree doesn't mean shit & won't get you a **job** just like that from any university unless you have a skill, social capital, connections, manners and a smile.

Thousands of **graduates** are out here unemployed, the Government shamelessly giving empty promises every day, their sons and daughters are holding top **jobs** without Education and we expect them to think about us on the ground. Shame! #NothingToCelebrateKE

💬   🔁 12   ♡ 14   ↑

Hello guys, am so desperate of **job**, am a **graduate** with bachelors arts in anthropology with IT, and link will be appreciated please #IkoKaziKe

💬   🔁 2   ♡   ↑

ESSA

How are students searching for education?

**In Kenya,** knowledge searches show a **rise of 16%**,

Knowledge related searches include keywords such as "hotel management courses", "university grading system" and "fulbright scholarship programmes" **showing higher intent** in obtaining information and making decisions on university choices.

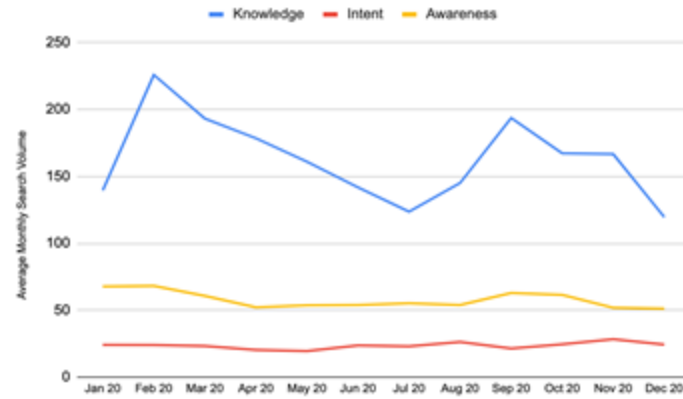**In Ghana,** awareness and intent searches show a **rise of 7% and 60%** respectively.

Intent searches that show the highest growth includes "college of education admission status" (**994%**) and "college admission) (**227%**), showing a huge increase in the number of university applicants

ESSA

How are students searching for education?
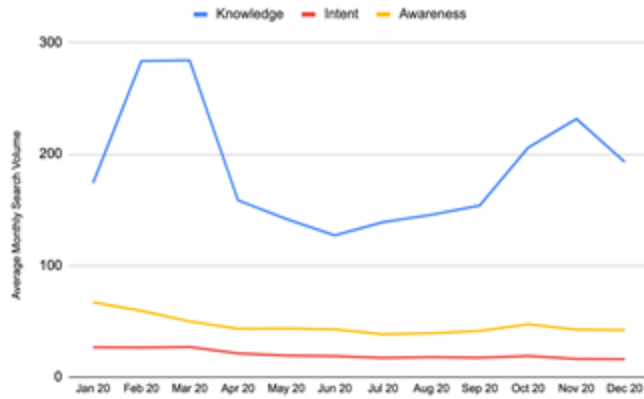
In Uganda, There is a fall in interest across all phases - awareness, knowledge and intent searches showed a **drop of 18%, 9% and 26%** in volume respectively.

Intent searches showed the highest decrease in interest, attributed to keywords such as "university admission in uganda" (**-61%**) and "scholarship applications" (**-36%**) - less students are looking to apply for universities and scholarships.

In Zambia, awareness and intent searches show a **rise of 13% and 80%** respectively.

Intent searches show the highest increase in interest, attributed to keywords such as "scholarship application letter" (**80%**) and "scholarship recommendation letter" (**45%**), showing the students' desire further their studies with scholarships.

How are students searching for jobs?

In Kenya, Intent searches had a **rise of 25%** in volume, showing that more people are seeking information and looking at job applications.

These searches include keywords such as "job application letter sample pdf", "job resume" and "job vacancy near me"

In Ghana, Searches across all phases experienced a fall in volume, with knowledge showing a **2% drop**, awareness and intent showing a **7% drop**.

This shows a **decrease in interest** towards finding a job in Ghana in the later half of 2020 compared to the first half. Keywords that show the highest drop include "qatar airway jobs"(**-82%**) and "cabin crew" (**-38%**), which could be attributed to the travel ban during covid.

How are students searching for jobs?

In Uganda, Intent searches show a **rise of 13%** while awareness and knowledge searches showed a **drop of 5% and 8%** respectively.
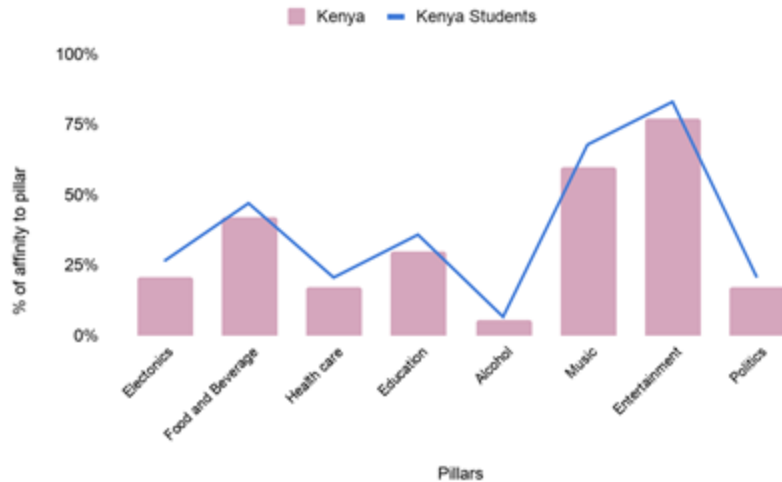
Keywords that show the highest growth include "job application letter sample pdf" (**267%**) and "job interview questions and answers" (**83%**), indicating people's desire to better prepare for job application and interviews.
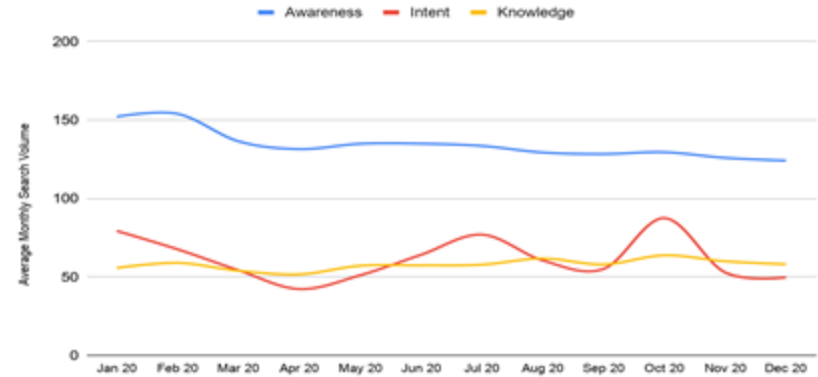
In Zambia, Awareness searches show a **drop of 9%** while knowledge and intent searches show a **rise of 7%.** Intent searches keywords that show the highest growth includes "job application letter sample pdf" (**305%**) and "job interview questions and answers" (**86%**).

Knowledge keywords that show the highest growth includes specific job titles such as "programme manager" (**100%**) and "it technician" (**81%**).

How can student online interests be connected to education and employment awareness?

Kenya — Kenya Students

% of affinity to pillar

Electronics, Food and Beverage, Health care, Education, Alcohol, Music, Entertainment, Politics

Pillars

Ghana — Ghana Students

% of affinity to pillar

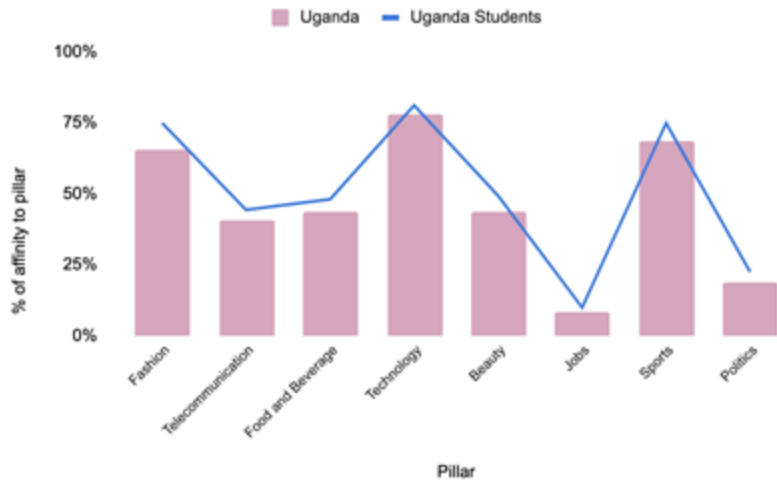Business, Alcohol, Food and, News and Media, Beauty, Sports, Jobs, Finance

Pillar

In Kenya, the highest online interests for students in the 18-24 age range are food and beverage and entertainment related material. There is little gender difference here and 63% of students are from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
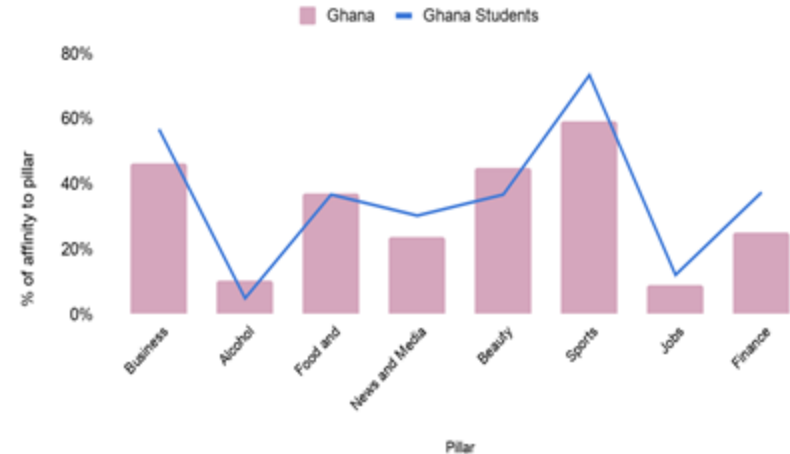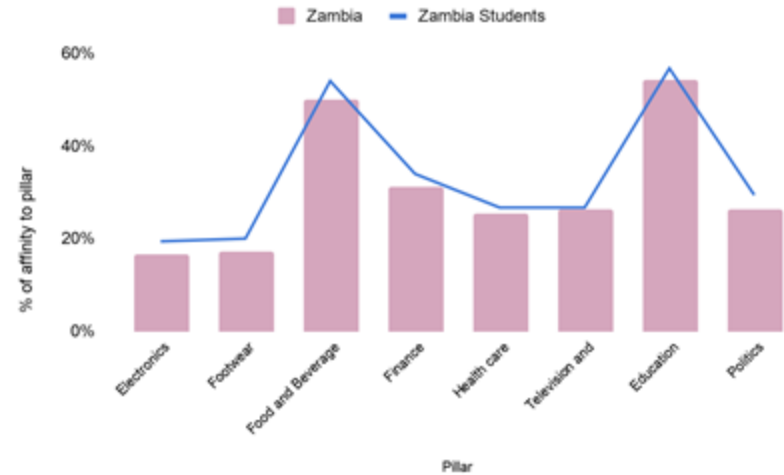
In Ghana, the highest online interests for students in the 18-24 age range are food and beverage and sports related material. Female students have a higher interest in food and beverage and beauty than male students. 57% of students are from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

ESSA

How can student online interests be connected to education and employment awareness?

In Uganda, the highest online interests for students in the 18-24 age range are technology and sports related material. There is little gender difference here and 68% of students are from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

In Zambia, the highest online interests for students in the 18-24 age range are food and beverage and education related material. Female students have a higher interest in both food and beverage and education. 41% of students are from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

How can universities and civil society actors support students online?

To maximise effectiveness, students need to be exposed to easily accessible information online - by focusing on disseminating information on social media platforms most commonly used by students, we can ensure that our messaging can reach the students more easily and extensively.

1. **Address the barriers in each stage of the journey with country specific strategies.** For example, both Ghana and Kenya, based on the online discourse, do not have as many scholarships available as Uganda and Zambia. The presence of both the African Scholarships Hub and the Edu Jobs platform should be blostered in these countries. Similarly in Kenya and Uganda, there is not as much online presence of employment agencies. This allows Edu Jobs to capture that market. In Ghana and Kenya, Edu Jobs can partner with existing employment agencies to garner more online traffic.

2. **Highlight the enablers in each stage of the journey through search redirection-** Legitimate information on scholarships affordability and re-skilling is not readily available online. Through its own online assets and partnerships with key scholarship providers, ESSA can ensure search traffic is redirected to crucial information sources on these topics.

3. **Use digital marketing tactics to reach students with the right messages.** Push ads online based on the students' interests - messaging should be tailored to suit students' top interests in each country to increase its effectiveness (eg. post technology related lessons or jobs such as data science training course to students in Uganda / engage radio hosts or TV personalities to advertise career fairs or education seminars in Kenya / use the high interest in education in Zambia as an opportunity).

4. **Using search behaviour to measure impact (in addition to existing KPIs)** - we should focus on growing interests in the "knowledge" and "intent" phases as these signal higher order intents from students seeking tertiary education and jobs (eg. aggressively pushing out education related information in Ghana and Zambia and job related information in Kenya, Uganda and Zambia).

How can policy makers support students online?

Engaging directly with young people to understand the barriers they face is essential to develop education policies and models that meet students needs.

1. **Use digital marketing to engage with students online.** In order to connect with students and win their trust, using the language and platforms they already use is key. Messaging about policies that affect students should be tailored to suit students' top interests in each country to increase its effectiveness (eg. post technology related lessons or jobs such as data science training course to students in Uganda / engage radio hosts or TV personalities to advertise career fairs or education seminars in Kenya).

2. **Students need more information about student finance.** Students turn to social media for information on scholarship applications. There is a need for clear information about student finance options online so more young people can access them. Understanding student finance needs in order to develop effective student finance models is essential.

3. **Use digital platforms to understand employment skills needs.** Graduates are utilising social media platforms such as Twitter to "advertise" themselves when searching for jobs, by uploading their academic results and graduation certificate in their posts. Employers also use social media platforms to search for applicants, by stating details of the jobs and internships such as salary, scope and requirements and circulating them online. Policy makers can learn from this data to understand the skills students have and the skills they are lacking, and what skills employers are looking for.

4. **Work with organisations who have youth networks and can synthesise evidence.** To do this effectively, engaging with oganisations like Quilt.Ai and ESSA can provide the tools and reach needed. These organisations can gather and synthesize evidence about young people online and engage with young people directly to understand where the greatest needs are on pressing issues like employment. Working with organisations such as these on surveys, focus groups and research will help improve education policy and delivery.

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LONDON

DELHI

NEW YORK

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AT SCALE

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