Chapter 6
Social Media Consumption Among Kenyans:
Trends and Practices

Patrick Kanyi Wamuyu

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4241-2519

United States International University – Africa, Kenya

ABSTRACT

Despite the growing popularity of social media among Kenyans, there is limited baseline data on the consumption of these platforms by different Kenyan communities based on demographics such as age, gender, education, income, and geolocation. The study set out to fill this gap through a baseline survey on social media consumption in Kenya. The study used a mixed-method approach, involving a survey of 3,269 respondents and 37 focus group discussions. The social media platforms in use are WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Snapchat. However, the use of social media differs by demographics. Kenyans use social media for entertainment, education, jobs, politics, sports, and social issues. Most Kenyans access social media using phones for 1-3 hours daily. Motivations for using social media include the acquisition of information, entertainment, and social interactions. Most social media users have experienced fake news, cyberbullying, and bombardment with graphic images of sex and advertisements. Kenyans consider social media to be addictive, expensive, and time-wasting.

BACKGROUND

Social Media has revolutionized how individuals, communities, and organizations create, share, and consume information. Social networks have also helped people to communicate, breaking down the geographical barriers which restricted instant communication thus permitting successful social media-facilitated collaboration. However, many social media users are also faced with emerging challenges associated with the dark side of social media use. These include ethical and privacy violation issues, data abuse and misuse, the credibility of social media content, hate speech, fake news, and bot-driven interactions. Social media has also been associated with social and economic ills including family disin-

tegration, dented reputations, and facilitation of terrorism. Social Media include SMS-based messaging platforms (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat), blogging platforms (e.g. WordPress, Blogger), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Xing), Microblogs (e.g. Twitter, Tumblr), community media sites (e.g. Instagram, Snapchat, Flickr, YouTube, Dailymotion), wiki-based knowledge-sharing sites (e.g. Wikipedia), Social news aggregation sites and websites of news media (e.g. Buzzfeed, Huffington Post, Tuko News), Social Bookmarking sites (e.g. del.icio.us, Digg), social curation sites (e.g. Reddit, Pinterest) and websites by traditional news organizations, forums, mailing lists, newsgroups, social question and answer sites (e.g. Quora), user reviews (e.g. Yelp, Amazon) and location-based social networks (e.g. Foursquare).

Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) in Kenya have grown rapidly since the Internet was first launched in the early 1990s. Kenya is described as the Silicon Savanah owing to its dynamic ICT sector that has seen the development of globally acclaimed applications such as M-Pesa and Ushahidi. Ushahidi (https://www.ushahidi.com/) is an open-source platform that allows collection of distributed data via SMS, email or web and visualize it on a map or timeline from the public for use in crisis response. M-Pesa (https://www.safaricom.co.ke/personal/m-pesa) is a mobile money transfer service, payments and micro-financing service, in Kenya. Social media has become a key aspect in Kenyan public discourse, facilitating online discussions while at the same time being a key subject of scholarly, socio-cultural, economic, and political debates. Despite the growing popularity of social media platforms, there is limited baseline data on the consumption of the digital media by different Kenyan communities.

Statement of the Problem

Several studies have studied distinct use of different social media platforms including, Twitter (Tully, & Ekdale, 2014) and Facebook (Wamuyu, 2018). The Kenya Audience Research Foundation (KARF, 2020) has also been conducting media consumption audits/surveys since 2007 for their clients, with a focus on traditional media and its audiences. Nendo (Nendo, 2020) observes the use of the internet, apps, websites and social media by businesses in Kenya and providing statistical insights to enterprises in form of infographics. Studies have also explored the use of social media in different sectors of the Kenyan economy such as banking (Njeri, 2014; Njoroge & Koloseni, 2015), journalism (Nyamboga, 2014; Media Council of Kenya, 2016), community development (Murungi, 2018; Ndlela & Mulwo, 2017), advertising and marketing (Mwangi & Wagok, 2016; Aluoch, 2017) and in post-election crisis (Makinen & Kuira, 2008; Ogola, 2019).There is no data on research or a baseline survey on social media in Kenya despite its wide usage and consumption. Therefore, the study set out to fill this research gap by conducting a baseline survey on Social Media consumption in Kenya to identify the patterns of social media usage among Kenyans as well the factors motivating their use of social media.

Research Questions

The proliferation of internet-enabled mobile devices has led to the rapid development of social networking sites, resulting in a continued reconfiguration of ways in which individuals or groups access and use social media platforms. Nevertheless, little is known on how different social media platforms are relevant to diverse groups of people in Kenya based on demographics such as age, gender, education level, geographical location and income. The study was guided by the following questions: (1) what are the major Social Media sites and apps used by Kenyans?; and (2) what are the motivations behind use of

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