

Chapter 13

Blogs as Pathways to Information and Influence Within the Kenyan Blogosphere

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ABSTRACT

Kenya has a robust blogger community, with hundreds of active bloggers and a variety of stimulating blogs on politics, agriculture, technology, education, fashion, food, entertainment, sports, and travel. The purpose of this chapter was to explore whether Kenyans participate in online discussions and to determine the role of Kenyan bloggers in online communities. Data was collected through a survey of 3,269 respondents aged between 14 and 55 years and social media mining on Twitter using Network Overview, Discovery and Exploration for Excel (NodeXL) API. Survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation while mined data was analyzed for centrality metrics. The study identified Farmers Trend, Ghafila Kenya, KahawaTungu, and Kachwanya as influential blogs in the Kenyan blogosphere and that most Kenyan women read travel and food and fashion blogs while men mostly read sports and politics blogs. This chapter contributes to a better understanding of the Kenyan blogosphere.

INTRODUCTION

Sánchez-Villar, Bigné, and Aldás-Manzano (2017) define blogs as websites where people write about recent events or topics that interest them. Herring et al., (2015, pp.1) define blogs as frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence. Blogs allow individuals and organizations to engage in discussions with the blog authors and readers over time facilitating exchange of ideas and the emergence of individuals who are influencers or opinion leaders. Kenya has a robust blogger community with hundreds of active bloggers. In 2015, the Bloggers Association of Kenya (BAKE) Chairman Kennedy Kachwanya indicated that there were an estimated 15,000 registered blogs

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in Kenya, with over 3,000 of, these active blogs registered by Kenyans on the WordPress, Blogger and Tumblr platforms (BAKE, 2015, pp. 2).

The Kenyan blogger community is mainly synonymous with political bloggers. This could be attributed to the fact that the Kenyan political blogosphere has over the years been considered antagonistic. It is worth noting that political discourse on Twitter is more likely to be opinionated and often more negative concerning political candidates than that on blogs (Pew Research Center, 2011; Choi, Sang & Park, 2012). However, Kranzberg (1985) contends that technology is not inherently good or bad; nor is it neutral, and as such Kenyans are increasingly turning to blogs for news, information, politics, and entertainment. It has also been said that technology is inherently political and that technologies are compatible with certain political configurations and relationships (Winner, 2009). There is also an assumption that most Kenyans read political blogs than any other kind of blogs, yet, there are many and more stimulating blogs on matters education, fashion, food, entertainment, sports and travel in the Kenyan blogosphere as listed on BAKE's website. There are more readers of the entertainment, educational, business and sports blogs than there are political blog readers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Blogs and bloggers have received a lot of attention from researchers across diverse disciplines such as marketing, information technology, information systems, communication and journalism as they influence most spheres of life. Blogs are sources of opinions and sentiments allowing bloggers to exert influence over the blog readers (Tan & Na, 2013). Karanja (2016) describes bloggers as influential agenda setters. But, to have any influence through social media, one has to know what to share, how to share, where to share, and how often to share. Most Kenyan bloggers know the importance of using multiple social media platforms, and are good in sharing the same message in multiple platforms. On a given day, a blogger prepares and posts a story on their blog, tweets the link, adds the blogpost link on their Facebook page, and creates an Instagram hashtag about the blogpost as well as sharing the post's link in several WhatsApp groups. Bloggers also tend to share blog post content from influential blogs (Tan & Na, 2013). A social media influencer is defined as an independent third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, p. 90).

In the absence of any previous research on the perceived influence of bloggers among the Kenyan online community, this study serves as the basis from which one can examine the Kenyan blogosphere and gain an understanding on whether Kenyans do read online blogs, participate in online debates and to assess how influential Kenyan bloggers are. The study uses betweenness centrality to test whether bloggers act as a bridging agent in social communication networks on Twitter, i.e. if more people depend on the blogger to make connections with other people.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The use of social media as a source of information has triggered renewed interest in social media analytics research (Struweg, 2018). For example, identifying the influencers in a given online ecosystem "can be useful in tasks such as planning successful advertising strategies, political campaigning, and identifying

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