

CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: CASE OF USHAHIDI PLATFORM IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study was to assess the achievements of Ushahidi platform with regard to conflict prevention and management in Kenya from 2007. The paradigm that was found suitable for this study is Pragmatism. The study used a mixed approach. In this study, interviews, focus group discussions and content analysis of the Ushahidi platform were chosen as the tools of data collection. In order to bring order, structure and interpretation to the collected data, the researcher systematically organized the data by coding it into categories and constructing matrixes. After classifying the data, the researcher compared

and contrasted it to the information retrieved from the literature review. The study concluded that social media is an important communication tool among the youth and young adults. Social media's popularity can be attributed to certain key elements which include: it responds to the youth's desire for communication; it is affordable and has the opportunity for instantaneous communications. The study recommends that Ushahidi platform should be seen as an agent of social change and should discuss the social mobilization which may be able to bring about.

Key Words: *social media platforms, conflict management, Ushahidi Platform, Kenya*

INTRODUCTION

Social media is modern tool for communication, which spreads information and connects people very rapidly. Meanwhile, its role in the conflict and post-conflict situations is not properly appreciated. Existing studies and researches mostly underline negative role of media during conflicts, few ones focus on the role of social media in the reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction activities and trust building processes. Social media is a powerful tool and new opportunity for conflict resolution. During last decade civil societies, activists, representatives of the governments and political parties actively use it as a communication means with their audiences.

Ushahidi (meaning "testimony" in Swahili) is a simple web-based mapping platform originally designed to map reports of human-rights abuses using text messages (SMS), e-mails, and information submitted via an online form. The first Ushahidi map was created to show Kenya's postelection violence in January 2008. Bloggers in Kenya and from the Kenyan Diaspora launched the platform to map human-rights violations that would otherwise have gone completely undocumented by the mainstream media and official election observers. Ushahidi Inc., a nonprofit technology company, was created several months after the elections to improve the mapping platform and make it free and open-source and thus widely usable. Several subsequent versions of the platform have since been used to create more than ten-thousand live maps in more than 140 countries. Those engaged in these mapping projects have included humanitarian and human-rights organizations, media companies, civil society groups, political and environmental activists, and distributed volunteer networks. The Ushahidi platform was

particularly used as “liberation technology” in Egypt during the country’s parliamentary elections in the fall of 2010.

The platform represents an important convergence of new technologies. SMS, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, smart phone apps, voicemail, and email can all be combined with Ushahidi. Examining Ushahidi instead of studying the impact of certain tweets or YouTube videos in isolation allows for a focus on broader multimedia content. Focusing on the Ushahidi platform also facilitates the study of concrete uses of social media, such as election monitoring. Ushahidi platform can be viewed as an example of a liberation and accountability technology. This is according to Larry David (2013). What is missing, however, is research to support these claims.

The Ushahidi platform is free and open-source mapping software that allows anyone to create a live and rich multimedia map of an event or situation. Unlike the standard Google Maps, the Ushahidi platform allowed witnesses in Kenya to text in their reports of human-rights violations using SMS. A simple SMS “short code” was set up with the telecommunications company Safaricom to make this happen. The bloggers shared the map on their blogs to get the word out and thus began to crowd source crisis information. They documented information on human-rights violations that would otherwise have gone largely unnoticed by mainstream media and election-monitoring organizations.

Studies have then been undertaken on the Ushahidi social media platform as well as conflict prevention. Goldstein and Rotich (2008) undertook a study on Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya’s 2007–2008 Post-Election Crises. Using the lens of the 2007–2008 Kenyan presidential election crisis, this case study illustrated how digitally networked technologies, specifically mobile phones and the Internet, were a catalyst to both predatory behavior such as ethnic-based mob violence and to civic behavior such as citizen journalism and human rights campaigns. Otunba (2010) looked into Preventing Interstate Armed Conflict: Whose responsibility? The study discovered that no single institution has the responsibility to prevent interstate armed conflict but rather conflict prevention can only be achieved by collective efforts of the international community involving both state and non state actors. Lastly the study showed that quite a lot is being done in this area of conflict prevention but there is room for improvement. Wambiya (2013) looked into the role of social media as a tool for peace building and conflict prevention in Kenya, the case of Nairobi County. The study found out that over 80 percent of the respondents were on social media. Majority of the respondents had a circle of social media friends of about 101-1000. The study also established that mainstream media (televisions and newspapers) was used by respondents to complement social media in giving political updates. Kiplagat (2014) undertook a study on the role of media in conflict management: the case of electoral conflict in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The study found out that media played both conflict escalation and de-escalation roles during 2007/08 Post Election Violence. Some of the negative media roles include encouraging hate speech, running parallel tallying centers, misrepresentation of information, and incitement. Some positive roles included

conducting civic education, preaching peace, fair coverage of political campaigns, and fair coverage of contentious issues during peace negotiations.

THEORIES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflict Theory

This theory was propounded by three sociologists namely: Karl Marx, Simmel and Coser. It was developed as an alternative to Structural Functionalism Theory (Ritzer, 1996). Conflict theory is a perspective in sociology that emphasize the social, political, or material inequality of a social group, that critique the broad socio-political system, or that otherwise detract from structural functionalism and ideological conservatism. Conflict usually occurs primarily as a result of a clash of interests in the relationship between parties, groups or states, either because they pursue opposing or incompatible goals. According to this theory, the society is full of conflicts and this has to change if peace and harmony is to be realized.

This theory fits for this study because it is virtually impossible not to have beliefs and values about the role of conflict. Some people say that all conflict is destructive and should be avoided at all cost. But there are some conflicts that are beneficial to societies and individuals alike. Conflict can be beneficial to those dissatisfied with the status quo (those who wish to keep things as they are). Too often managing or preventing conflict have sometimes just deferred or postponed the needed change in the power relations. In some cases conflict management are reduction are productive of beneficial change. In other cases, it is best to escalate conflict and contest for power. The elite who own the mainstream media in Kenya and most African states usually control to keep their economic, status and party interests. Internet and social media which presents a decentralization and defragmentation of communication would thus present opportunity for wider democratic space which might result to evolutionary conflict (resulting to beneficial change) as opposed to contest and revolutions which might result to violent conflict as the masses are dissatisfied with the constant doses of manipulated information and exploitation over the years as it happened in the Arab world.

Achievements of Ushahidi platform with regard to Conflict Prevention

Communities everywhere are the original first responders in any crisis, before the emergency services, before the army arrive – in those places where official responders exist, are not parties to conflict, and can get there in time. And communication technologies are the tools of those communities of first responders. From the riot wombles of London organising the post-riot community clean-up to bloggers in Kenya, the ‘Peace Provocateurs’ of Ambon to the violence interrupters of Chicago, communities are increasingly organising rapid responses to violence with their own means of broadcasting and sharing. In perhaps the well-documented case of citizens taking action in the face of escalating violence, a group of Kenyan bloggers responded within days to the post-election violence of January 2008, by developing a platform to connect real-time reports of incidents via SMS and online to an open and live map. That collective and

spontaneous response to help fellow citizens in the midst of a media blackout and widespread panic, has evolved into a disruptive and inspiring non-profit technology company – Ushahidi, continuously developing their tools for use by everyone and anyone, whether for tracking violence, harassment, election corruption or tasty burgers.

Ushahidi in turn is now used by brave individuals working together on the Syria Tracker project, submitting, collecting and verifying as far as possible, eyewitness reports of violence, death and torture, in a place where little information is allowed to leak out, and disinformation a currency of the conflict. In the face of freelancing fighters, external forces pressing in from Russian arms, Hezbollah to funding from Qatar and Saudi Arabia, individuals have emerged both within and outside Syria who are trying to bring a clearer picture to the wider world of what is happening there. In Coventry, Rami Abdul Rahman has become a one-man reporting band (aka the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights), spending his days processing reports, information from his network of contacts inside Syria to document casualties, and becoming a source that has proved vital to mainstream news media. In the first months of protest in Syria in 2011, Rami Nakhla was based in Beirut, and played a crucial role as curator of citizen reports through Skype tweets and videos until threats to his life from pro-government agents forced him to flee Lebanon. Ushahidi has developed from a group of bloggers and programmers to an agile and responsive tech company, responsive and dedicated to its community of users and connected to a wide network of volunteers both on and offline. This culminated in a massive collaborative conflict prevention exercise during the most recent Kenyan elections in March 2013 – Uchaguzi, a large scale deployment with hundreds of online volunteers from all over the world, connecting citizen reports via SMS, email, twitter, with emergency services and election monitors. One of the most striking aspects of the deployment was the huge number of messages from people across Kenya, reporting calm in their area and urging peaceful elections. The silent majority who want to live in peace, made loud.

New media technologies have opened avenues for the African people to participate more directly, and more strategically, in public affairs. A closed door of morbid silence has suddenly been flung wide open, and different people-centered initiatives are emerging as the African general public utilizes these new technologies to address societal issues. One exciting and timely “bottom-up” innovation being used as a method of conflict transformation is the Ushahidi crowd sourcing platform in Kenya.

Ushahidi is not, however, the only organization at the fore of the people’s new media revolution in Kenya. The Uwiano platform is a multi stakeholder medium facilitated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for early warning coordination, among other activities. Uwiano, which uses the crowd sourcing principle of Ushahidi, was launched in Kenya in 2010 for a referendum on whether to adopt a new constitution; it is currently part of joint, multilevel stakeholders’ efforts on early warning and conflict prevention in Kenya. As more and more members of the public are coming up with groundbreaking ideas on how to participate in

and contribute to peacemaking efforts using crowd sourcing platforms, it clearly demonstrates how integral people's voices are in producing solutions to society's problems.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Site of Study

The study was conducted in Nairobi County. The County is one of the 47 counties of Kenya. The smallest yet most populous of the counties, its capital is Nairobi, which is also the capital and largest city of Kenya. Nairobi County was founded in 2013 on the same boundaries as Nairobi Province, after Kenya's 8 provinces were subdivided into 47 counties. The county is composed of 17 Parliamentary constituencies. Nairobi has experienced one of the most rapid growths in urban centers. This is unlikely to slow down any time soon because the population in Kenya increases by an average of about 3% i.e. 1 million each year. The county was viewed as hosting the Ushahidi platform headquarters. The Ushahidi platform for crisis communication is the case study selected for this research. There are several reasons for purposefully selecting a case study, based on whether it is information-rich, critical, relevant, unique, or extreme Stake, 1995, Patton, (1990).

Research Paradigm

Research paradigm refers to perceptions, beliefs and assumptions of how knowledge is obtained. Two broad categories of research philosophy have been proposed, namely: Positivism and Phenomenology. Phenomenology developed by Husserl (1907), is the investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced. It does not consider the theories about their causal explanations or their objective reality. According to Manen (2007), phenomenologic inquiry focuses on people's experience of phenomena and how such experiences are interpreted. Its main aim is therefore to seek to understand how people construct meaning. Understanding people's perceptions, perspectives and understandings of a particular situation (or phenomenon) is the primary aim of a phenomenological research study. Manen (2007) asserts that, Phenomenologists' main concern is what things mean, and not identification or measurement of phenomena. Phenomenologists in particular believe that human experience is in itself a source of data. Measuring the existence of physical phenomena does not necessarily constitute the only

true research. Positivism philosophical system fronted by Comte (1850), argues that knowledge is more about description and not just questioning. Positivists can only recognize positive facts and events that can be observed. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, (2009) posit that the positivist philosophy considers only observable facts that can both be measured and counted. The positivist system follows the traditional, scientific view of the world. It is characterized by formulation and measurement of hypothesis based on existing theory of observable social realities. The positivism system uses empirical measurement based on quantitative methods, experiments and surveys as well as statistical analysis (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Positivists argue that using scientific method and language to investigate and write about human experience is supposed to keep the research free of the values, passions, politics and ideology of the researcher. To achieve the objectives of the study; hypotheses were deduced operationalized, tested and inferences drawn from the data analysis results which formed a basis for generalization. The research paradigm adopted in this study was predominantly positivist because positivism follows a logical process to verify claims about knowledge or epistemology. Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with determination of the nature of knowledge and the extent of human knowledge and attempts to address the distinction of adequate and inadequate knowledge. Paradigms represent alternative philosophical orientations to knowledge and its justification. Two major schools of thought exist with respect to research paradigms representing two distinct paradigms; positivism and interpretivism based on assumptions regarding knowledge (epistemology) and truth or reality (ontology).

Research Design

The study used mixed methods. The choice of these methods is influenced by the perceived varying degrees of opinions, views and perception of divergent respondents sampled. Mixed methods is defined as research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of study (Creswell, 2003). Three ways are apparent in the mixed methods literature for mixing the quantitative and qualitative data;

1. By combining or integrating them
2. By connecting them from the data analysis step of the first source of data to the data collection step of the second source of data so that one source builds on the other or helps to explain the other
3. By embedding one secondary or supporting source of data into a larger source of data to provide additional information in a study.

In the process of research, these three forms of mixing-merging, connecting or embedding will occur during various stages of the research such as during data collection, data analysis or interpretation (Creswell, 2003). Creswell (2009) argues that qualitative research design is suitable in natural settings. Since the study mostly focuses on respondents' perceptions of media

and conflict management issues, qualitative approach gives more room for interpretation and understanding. Strauss & Corbin (1999) have further shown that those who use qualitative research obtain satisfactory results and appropriate answers to the central research questions being investigated. This design has been chosen because of its usefulness in obtaining an overall picture of the study. In addition, quantitative research consists of those studies in which the data concerned can be analyzed in terms of numbers. Quantitative research is based more directly on its original plans and its results are more readily analyzed and interpreted (Best and Khan, 2009). Qualitative research is more open and responsive to its subject. In this study the researcher collected both qualitative and quantitative data concurrently or at the same time and merged the data to form one interpretation of the data. This interpretation would provide both qualitative and quantitative information about magnitude and frequency as well as qualitative information from individual perspectives from participants and the context in which they were commenting on the research problem. This design is called the triangulation or concurrent mixed methods design. This means that the quantitative data and the qualitative data are merged by the researcher in the analysis

Target Population

Population can be defined as all the members of a real or hypothetical set of people, event or objects to which a researcher wishes to generalize the results of the study. In total 333 respondents, team was targeted. The study population included students from the universities within Nairobi County who use Kenya's Ushahidi Platform in Kenya, Sole proprietor, Technical advisor, Lead developer, Team leader, corporate account manager, Project manager and Technologist

Sampling and Sampling Techniques

Sampling is the process of selecting the people who participated in a study. This process should be representative of the whole population. Sampling is hence the procedure, process or technique of choosing a sub-group from a population to participate in the study, (Ogula, 2005). A sample is a smaller group or sub-group obtained from the accessible population (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). This study adopted the stratified sampling technique. From the possible 200 target population, stratified random sampling was employed to select a total of 60 sample population. This is 30% of the total population. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) states that in stratified sampling where population within each strata is known, a sample of 10-30% is adequate representation

Data Collection Methods and Tools

Triangulation is used in social sciences for supporting the validity of results by adopting different methods of researching an issue or a research question. In this paper, interviews, focus group discussions and content analysis of the Ushahidi platform are chosen as the tools of data collection.

Use of questionnaires: Given the sample of respondents participating in this research, using questionnaires as instruments of data collection will be ideal. The researcher considers this instrument since it ensures that confidentiality will be upheld and it saves time. The questionnaires mostly consist of structured questions and fewer open ended questions. Structured questions compel the respondents to provide specific answers, while the few open ended questions allowed for diverse responses, both approaches are essential for variety and getting the respondent's perception of the phenomena being investigated. Administering questionnaires will generally allow for information to be collected from a large sample and in diverse locations.

Key informant interview: This is a conversational practice where knowledge is produced through interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee or a group of interviewees. Unlike everyday conversations, the research interview is most often carried out to serve the researcher ends, which are external to the conversation itself (Creswell, 2003). Most qualitative research interviews are semi-structured as a consequence of the agenda being set by the researcher's interests yet with room for respondents. The researcher will use face to face interview methods to collect a wide range of information on the role of social media as a proactive tool for conflict prevention. The Key informants will be drawn from the field of peace studies and conflict prevention, as well as in the field of social media. A social media expert will be equally interviewed; this expert has also taken part in the development and operationalization of the Ushahidi Crisis Mapping and Reporting platform. Marshall and Rossman (1999) state that qualitative data is often dependent on key informant interview, interviews allows the researcher to understand the statistical data collected from quantitative research by explaining the figures and giving further information beyond the figures. Key people at ushahidi were interviewed. These are five senior employees in the platform. In addition youths who use ushahidi platform were also interviewed, particularly varsity students and Kibera youth leaders.

Focus Group Discussions: The researcher held focus groups discussion in each of the four locations. Each focus group will constitute of 5 to 7 youths. Focus groups allow the researcher to get the participants perspective, attitudes, experiences and reactions on the phenomena of interest by way of interaction and discussion with the participants. Focus groups have a high apparent validity since the idea is easy to understand, the result are believable are low cost and helps in getting quick results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Achievements of Ushahidi platform in peace building and conflict prevention

The study sought to establish the achievements of Ushahidi platform in peace building and conflict prevention. The study established that through use of ushahidi platform, today, people are able to create and share digital content, which facilitates open participation, collaboration and collective knowledge creation throughout the Internet. Through these means, communities and groups can record, analyze, and discover a variety of patterns that are important in their lives. By

means of messages, blogs, micro-blogs (tweets), pictures, videos, audio recordings, SMS's, GPS's and other ways of conveying information, it is possible that communities and individuals can actively participate in sensing, communicating and analyzing aspects of their lives in an on going basis, acting less and less as passive consumers of information

Further, the study revealed that in its current form, Ushahidi is a collaborative mapping platform that enables real-time aggregation of SMS's, tweets, emails, photos, videos, comments and also voice recordings, with location, time and date marks. After an initial categorization, reported events or incidents are accumulated or clustered graphically on a map. The result is a dynamic situational map updated through participatory sensing from the grass roots as events unfold. In the aftermath of the crisis the resulting map becomes a searchable repository or memory of an event, something that has extraordinary implications for future evaluations, legal purposes or historical accounts

In addition, the study established that Ushahidi disrupted the established informational paradigm by providing a platform that allowed free, open and easy data entry by the general population and open downloads of all the available information for free by whoever needed it. By eliminating privileged access, it has provided an innovative first experience in the democratization of crisis information access, the possibility of auditing a response effort, of discovering where aid is needed and how to distribute it. The receptivity of communities of entrepreneurs in different countries that have implemented the platform has been astonishing, which demonstrates that the old wineskin needed to be changed. It was also revealed that a key component of Ushahidi is the ability to use mobile phones as a primary means of both sending crisis incidents and receiving updates. The Internet can be difficult to access or completely unavailable in some parts of the world, so the platform was created with the mobile phone as a foundational element.

One of the key respondents indicated that;

Ushahidi itself was originally created to deal with conflict prevention and response (it was first developed for the 2008 Kenyan post-election violence). Fourth Generation conflict and early warning tools like Ushahidi are being used in post-conflict peace-building; however there are few cases at the moment of such use. One example of the use of Ushahidi was by the Liberian peace building office. There is a need to integrate the knowledge and practice on the use of ICTs in conflict prevention with emerging knowledge and practice on the use of ICTs for peace building.

Extent of Ushahidi platform accessibility to Kenyans

The study sought to establish the extent of Ushahidi platform accessibility to Kenyans. The study revealed that Ushahidi, which means “testimony” in Swahili, is a platform that was initially developed to map reports of violence in Kenya after the post-election fallout at the beginning of

2008. The volunteer team behind Ushahidi rapidly developed a tool for Kenyans to report and map incidents of violence that they saw via SMS, email or the web. Within a week Ushahidi had gone from idea to live deployment. Ushahidi now serves as a prototype and a lesson for what can be done by combining crisis information from citizen generated reports, media and NGOs and mashing that data up with geographical mapping tools. The team behind Ushahidi became an organization that created a free and open source mapping and content management system which can be used by organizations worldwide in similar crisis-related situations. The main goal of the organization is to create a system that facilitates early warning systems and helps in data visualization for response and recovery.

Stage at which Ushahidi platform intervened in conflict prevention

The study sought to establish the stage at which Ushahidi platform intervened in conflict prevention in Kenya. The study revealed that in 2010, Ushahidi collaborated with partners to create the Uchaguzi-Kenya platform (an Ushahidi instance). It provided a channel for Kenyan citizens to communicate openly about the 2010 Kenyan referendum. The project was a success and opened up opportunities for future learning. The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, Knight Foundation and Ushahidi came together to identify these successes and challenges. The outcomes of this learning and evaluation project aim to help plan for future Uchaguzi instances and share learning to the broader user community.

Initiatives undertaken by Ushahidi platform

The study sought to determine the Initiatives undertaken by Ushahidi platform. The study revealed that the Ushahidi platform added new communication pathways (e.g., SMS, twitter, email, web entries, etc.) to provide more efficient and near real-time access to referendum/election information. Future projects should identify and consider integrating existing information flows to avoid duplication. For example, partnering with media organizations, such as radio stations, can have a broad reach with the community. Strongly consider creating a communications strategy (including campaign & feedback loops) at the assessment/planning stage. When using shortcode, consider coordinating with other organizations who may be using similar shortcodes. Consider designing messaging campaigns together to minimize confusion with the public. Consider a simulation exercise to test information flows, communication, technology, and volunteer teams.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that Facebook and Whatsapp were the most popular social media tools with 41.1 percent and 30 percent of the respondents having accounts on each platform respectively. This is a quite indication that the most accessible social Medias includes face book, what sap and twitter. It was also established that Social media can be effective because it is communication built primarily on relationships and deals with the user's circle of influence. The study established that through use of ushahidi platform, today, people are able to create and share

digital content, which facilitates open participation, collaboration and collective knowledge creation throughout the Internet. In tandem with the study findings, a report by Search for Common, (2013) states that “With its focus on user-generated information, Ushahidi is designed to be adaptable to SMS, mobile phone usage, and internet posts. While traditional information management systems are typically closed and controlled, Ushahidi is open and decentralized. These technologies allow for empowerment and ownership at the local community level. Unlike other and more traditional systems, Ushahidi closes the feedback loop in such a way that information collected can be communicated directly to those who most need to use it.”¹⁰ Ushahidi can be used in the context of a community not just for sourcing information to a community (“crowd sourcing”) but also to feed information back to that community (“crowd feeding”).

Ushahidi itself was originally created to deal with conflict prevention and response (it was first developed for the 2008 Kenyan post-election violence). Fourth Generation conflict and early warning tools like Ushahidi are being used in post-conflict peace-building; however there are few cases at the moment of such use. One example of the use of Ushahidi was by the Liberian peace building office. There is a need to integrate the knowledge and practice on the use of ICTs in conflict prevention with emerging knowledge and practice on the use of ICTs for peace building.

Several scholars have documented how social media was used as the main medium of communication that brought change to political leadership in Northern African states and the Middle East. The studies have shown how social media was instrumental in coordinating the protests during the uprising. They have also documented how civilians in authoritarian regimes relied on social media to champion their political rights. Middle East countries and Northern African have been further discussed in this study because they exemplified the most recent ways in which social media has been used to coordinate uprisings that later became revolutions. These regions have exposed the potential of social media in coordination and how social finds its place during conflicts.

Saila (2012) noted that in late 2007 and early 2008 most Kenyans didn't have access to the internet as they do presently, not even through cell phones as today. Those who were online experienced a wave of heightened activity. Many experienced the down side of uncontrolled communication, but others were able to even save lives through their blog posts and social media accounts. There was a strong intertextuality within these communications and SMS messages have therefore been included in as the new media

Similarly, Goldstein and Rotich (2009) noted that the social media functioned as an alternative medium for citizen communication or participatory journalism' but it was also used 'as channels for biased information, tribal prejudices, and hate speech. Digitally networked technologies 'were a catalyst to both predatory behaviour such as ethnic-based mob violence and to civic behaviour such as citizen journalism and human rights campaigns' during the post-election crisis

According to Wa-Mungai (2010) there was a strong intertextuality between sources of information and the means used to disseminate the information. Mass e-mails were shortened to fit SMS and Twitter accounts and mixed with rumour (Wa-Mungai 2010, 237) ‘Like SMS, cyberspace-based discussions were also fed on rumour and misinformation from the press’ (Wa-Mungai 2010, 237). The majority of those who participated in these discussions were pro-Raila Odinga and expressed despair for the ‘failure of democracy’ (wa-Mungai 2010, 238)

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings in this research project, the study concluded that social media is an important communication tool among the youth and young adults. Social media’s popularity can be attributed to certain key elements which include: it responds to the youth’s desire for communication; it is affordable and has the opportunity for instantaneous communications. Most of the youths in the study bought internet bundles to connect to social media and those who didn’t relied on their friends and relatives to connect. This means that internet has been made available in units that can be afforded by the users especially those hailing from area with socioeconomic challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that Ushahidi platform should be seen as an agent of social change and should discuss the social mobilization which may be able to bring about. The study further suggest that if we can look at Ushahidi platform as a development agent, can we then take this a step further and ask, or try to find, a methodology that looks at the Ushahidi platform as peacemaking agent, or to assist in the maintenance of peace in a post-conflict thereby tapping into Ushahidi platform’s full potential.

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