Social Media and the 2013 Kenya General Elections
SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE 2013 KENYA GENERAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract

Social Media is almost as powerful as the traditional media such as radio, television and print media in terms of reaching a larger audience. Social Media, from the least common ones like flickr, digg, upcoming, Technorati, MySpace, to the most popular ones like Youtube, Facebook and Twitter were actively used during Kenya’s 2013 elections by various candidates in the bid to relay campaign messages and rally supporters. This could be attributed to the increase in the use of internet among Kenyan 95.63 % of the population as in 2011 and mobile phone usage available to 75% of the country’s population.

The unique feature of social media in comparism to mainstream media in terms of the ease of accessibility, affordability, usability and immediacy among other features makes it a prudent alternative not only in propagating an electoral process in order to enhance transparency but also promoting peace. However, social media could also serve as an influential tool in the hands war mongers. This study which focuses on the role of social media in Kenya’s 2013 elections and its implications on African elections, highlights effective monitoring bodies such as the Umati and Uchaguzi among other Apps whose main work was to monitor social media platforms against provocative and inflammatory postings with the potential to incite violence. This ensured that social media, rather than its usage in the transmission of hate speech, was an instrumental tool for social activism, effective communication channel by the various political parties as well as encouraging participation in the entire electoral process.
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SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE 2013 KENYA GENERAL ELECTIONS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Kenya and by extension African countries continue to struggle to achieve a stable and more lasting democracy. Their inconsistent performance at the polls continue to serve as a stumbling block to the deepening of democratic tenets in a region plagued by civil wars, famine, poverty and drought. Unlike many advanced democratic states where there are strong and independent institutions, African political institutions are mostly weak and oftentimes at the mercy of power-drunk political leaders who manipulate them to their advantage.

The path to democratic consolidation has not been a smooth one in Africa. Political instability mainly caused by electoral disputes and conflicts are rampant in many African countries. Crisis in Zimbabwe, DR Congo, Cote d’Ivoire, Sudan, among others highlight the ongoing struggles that the continent faces in terms of democratic consolidation (Alex Laverty, 2011). And Kenya is no exception.

The last Kenyan elections held in 2007 resulted in an ethnic-based bloody conflict that claimed the lives of more than 1000 Kenyans and displaced over 300,000 others. The opposition alleged there were instances of electoral fraud and manipulation that favoured the incumbent president. This escalated into one of the unfortunate and worst politically motivated violence since the country gained independence from Britain in 1963.

The media cannot be shielded from the causes that are to blame for the rampant political instabilities that continue to fling the democratic process off the rails in Africa. The conventional media, particularly radio and television have sometimes unfortunately served as platforms for both political actors and ordinary citizens to spew hate and inflammatory speeches, incite violence, and stoke tribal tensions. A typical example is the most famous infamous Rwandan genocide, which is widely believed to have been caused by dangerous, irresponsible comments on a radio station inciting ethnic hatred and violence.

The indictment of the presidential aspirant for The Jubilee Coalition, Uhuru Kenyatta, and his vice William Ruto, by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for alleged crimes against humanity due to their role in the violent outbursts of the 2007 elections attests to this fact. It is alleged they inappropriately made use of the media to reach the bulk of their supporters to take up arms.

Furthermore, the emergence of the relatively new Social media, thanks to the internet, and the proliferation of mobile phones presents a whole new challenge for African governments in combating dangerous speech and snide tribal remarks that are the catalysts for potential and actual election violence that has been the bane of fledgling democracies in Africa. Whilst authorities are constantly seeking ways to address the misuse of the mainstream media especially during critical times of elections, Social media has become a vast platform for even people who

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1 Laverty, Alex (2011). “ICT, Social Media, and Elections in Africa: A Prospective Study”
hitherto had no measure of control over the use of the traditional media in pursuing their own agenda or making their voices heard.

Like the traditional media, social media also has the potential to stoke tensions and plunge a whole country into mayhem. Its distinctiveness from the mainstream traditional media like the newspapers, television, and film in terms of its high level of penetration, affordability, easy accessibility and usability, immediacy, permanence and convenience not only makes it a better alternative but sadly a more dangerous tool in the hands of war mongers.

Social media is almost as powerful as the traditional media in terms of reaching a larger audience. The real danger lies in the fact that social media is difficult to regulate and unscrupulous people who use it negatively can be hard to identify, track and bring to justice. Many have even attributed the strange but genuine increase in cyber bullying, online social predators, and the decrease in face-to-face interactions to the increase in the use of social media websites.

However, the focus of this report will center on its political implications in African elections and democracy, precisely the use or role of social media in the Kenyan elections.

Social media has been described as a double-edged sword that can be used to promote peace and also to incite violence. What is more terrifying is that, the threat of social media is very difficult to tackle since it is neither regulated - thoughts or opinions published on these platforms do not adhere to any strict ethical code of journalism or the core principles of journalism—nor does it pass through any official editing.

Thus, it presents a real and worrying threat to democratic consolidation in Africa where during tense elections a single provocative word is enough to fuel the seemingly intractable ethnic resentments into full-blown civil wars.

**1.1 SOCIAL MEDIA ENHANCES THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS**

The immense contribution of the media as the fourth estate of the realm in a constitutional rule is a well-known point that does not need to be belabored. The advent of social media is complementing the efforts of the traditional media in ensuring a transparent, accountable, and an all-inclusive system of governance. The increasing speed of news cycles and explosion of social media have only served to enhance the democratic processes and outcomes. Increasingly the balance of power is shifting in favour of citizens.

Underpinning this shift is people’s ability to communicate with large audiences at minimal cost, interact directly with decision-makers, build social movements rapidly and globally, inform and shape news agendas – all through media and social networks.²

Its contributions to both advanced and young democratic countries are immense. Though Social Media is relatively new especially in less developed countries in Africa, its impact on the political landscape cannot be overemphasized.

Social media in the modern era has the potential to liberate people from authoritarian regimes by facilitating mobilization against such rule. Little by little, the new media help to open up public spaces, creating a more pluralistic, and autonomous avenue of news, commentary, and information which provides a conducive platform

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² Media, social media and democratic governance (WP1110). (https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/conference/wp1110/)
for sensitizing and mobilizing the public in repressive countries into action.

Major political changes, such as those in the Middle East since 2010, can indeed be seen as a direct result of the use of social media, and can aptly be described as a veritable “Facebook Revolution”. (Unwin, 2012).³ Social Media helped dissidents drive dictators from power in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Indeed, the technology can empower those who wish to become political and change authoritarian rule. (Diamond, 2011).⁴

Even in liberated regimes, social media is likewise useful. Governments, the world over, are now resorting to this new media to explain their policies to their people. Through this same media, they are now able to elicit the views, opinions, suggestions and contributions of the people in the form of inputs into the political system. Social media is not one-sided like the traditional media. It is highly interactive and enables government officials and citizens to connect easily.

Gradually, the once-alienated citizens are being drawn into the management and administration of the affairs of their own state - the views of the public on the use of state resources and civic participation in the adoption, formulation and implementation of government policies are growing tremendously with the advent of social media.

Social Media has the enviable potential to contribute to free, fair and transparent elections thereby enhancing the electoral process. In recent elections on the African continent, ordinary citizens easily employ social media to keenly monitor the progress of the electoral process. During election campaigns, social media is effectively used by politicians in mobilizing even partially apathetic citizens to support their cause since mobilization is an indispensable exercise in political movements. This is particularly important in democratic dispensations where majority carries the vote.

Besides ambitious politicians who are utilizing social media to touch base with the ordinary citizens, the politically active public is using social media at a rate never seen before. The tech-savvy public employs social media to hold the government and government officials accountable. Dana Radcliffe confirms, “Protesters have used communications technology to organize massive demonstrations against government policies in Spain, Greece, Israel and India”.⁵ Their main targets were elected government officials they saw as corrupt or indifferent to the interests of most people in those countries.

It seems the public is constantly alerted on the actions and inactions of the people in whose hands they have entrusted the destiny of their nation on social media. Government officials and government projects, programmes and policies are constantly monitored, scrutinized and analyzed by people who quickly share their findings and conclusions on social media. People no longer have to wait on official news reports from the various newspapers, radio and televisions to be adequately informed on the state of affairs in their country.

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⁵ Radcliffe, Dana (October 18, 2011). “Can Social Media Undermine Democracy?” (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dana-radcliffe/can-social-media-undermine_b_1011290.html)
It is amazing how social media has suddenly turned many people into amateur journalists who readily relay any news item they pounce on to their colleagues and other users of social media. As Lorraine Onduru aptly noted, “new technologies have indeed encouraged the development of citizen journalism”.  

Audiences proactively collect and share emerging information with media houses and people in general. Audiences are invading an arena that has been the preserve of journalists. What is more, people have realized the importance of adopting an intelligent curiosity mindset, where they challenge what is presented before them. All these developments signal a new era of media consumers that are heavily involved in the process of information gathering. (Onduru, 2013)

Larry Diamond also stresses the power social media affords the ordinary citizens. He argues “It enables citizens to report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation, and expand the horizons of freedom”. (Diamond, 2011)

Besides, the rate at which Social Media transmits information is phenomenal. Access to information is very vital in the democratic process as it enables the citizenry to make informed choices, decisions and contributions to government policies, programmes and projects. Social media transfers information at a terrific speed. Since it consists of many interconnected individuals, information passed on from one person to another in a moment rapidly reaches tens of thousands of people.

Permanency of information stored on social media is also another plus to this new and innovative media. Industrial media, once created, cannot be altered (once a magazine article is printed and distributed, changes cannot be made to that same article) whereas social media can be altered almost instantaneously by comments or editing. (Morgan et al, 2010)

Politically-minded NGOs and CSOs whose main focus is on political reformation, civic liberty and social justice will no longer have to navigate a labyrinth of bureaucratic procedures and piles of paper work to trace cases of abuse, fraud and corruption in especially “high places” of government establishments. Social media makes such data gathering and documentation accessible and easier. As Larry Diamond observes, “The new ICTs are also powerful instruments for transparency and accountability, documenting and deterring abuses of human rights and democratic procedures”.

Social media provides a powerful shield for whistleblowers to leak information on corrupt deals of government officials by staying anonymous and concealing their identity whilst providing vital information to the public and other concerned institutions. It is becoming increasingly common for people to make secret recordings of conversations or capture events on their mobile phones and upload them on the Internet through YouTube.

In addition, social media can provide the anonymity necessary to challenge authority. Hypothetical Tweets such as “[electoral commission] shuts down voting early,” or “Judge receives bribe,” are the bits of information that can transcend government censorship, educate the
public, generate public outcry, and keep politicians more honest. (Oliver, 2012)\(^7\)

In spite of all the above benefits social media has brought to Democracy, some have argued that Democratic government requires much more than just Tweets and Facebook support groups. (Oliver, 2012) As Malcolm Gladwell describes in an essay in The New Yorker, social media is excellent at increasing participation through networks, but it is inadequate for structuring hierarchies, such as a government.\(^8\)

Paul Oliver (2012) critically notes that the passive relationships of social media do not provide the rules, regulations, and procedures necessary for democratic government. According to Darrel West (2011)\(^9\), Social Networking has proven difficult to sustain political interest and activism online over time and move electronic engagement from campaigns to governance despite its track record for generating democratic engagement.

Besides, most of the information on social media websites could be based on hearsays and even unverified gossips, the authenticity of such “unofficial social media news” is mostly questioned and can create undue tension, anxiety, and ultimately fear and panic among the public depending on the nature of the information.

This report therefore seeks to investigate the role Social media played – positive or negative- in the Kenyan elections and its implications for other African countries. It would be very helpful in alerting political scientists and analysts, security agencies, government officials, civil societies, non-governmental organizations, and the general public to the threat or otherwise of social media in African elections by contributing to the increasing discussion on the impact of social media on democratic governance.

In this light, the purpose of the following review is to assess the role of social media in contributing to a more stable and lasting democracy, focusing particularly for the purpose of this research on its impact on elections.

\section*{2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW}

This section presents the state of the literature on the subject matter of new technologies, social media, electioneering and other related issues. Specifically, the section discusses issues including the concept of Liberation Technology, freedom and democracy, traditional mass media, election violence, and the impact of various types of social media on elections in general and of Kenyan elections in particular.

Larry Diamond (2011) refers to any form of information and communication technology (ICT) that can expand political, social and economic freedom as Liberation Technology. In the contemporary era, Diamond argues, it means essentially the modern, interrelated forms of digital ICT – the computer, the Internet, the mobile phone, and countless innovative applications for them, including “new social media” such as Facebook and Twitter.


\(^8\) Gladwell, Malcom (October 4, 2010) “Why the revolution will not be tweeted”. (http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/100404a_fact_gladwell?printable=true)

Larry Diamond has coined the term Liberation Technology to describe the role ICT and social media play in affording the common people a united voice against oppression in authoritarian regimes and thereby securing their own liberty. Diamond notes that “Liberation Technology” is able to enable citizens to report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation, and expand the horizons of freedom.

The new ICTs are two way and even multi-way forms of communication unlike the radio and television and one can instantly reach large audience using a social media platform like Twitter and Facebook. Since it makes users active by turning them into journalists, commentators, videographers, entertainers, and organizers, this technology can empower those who wish to become political and to challenge authoritarian rule to do so with boldness and ease.

He captures the challenging role of ICT and Social Media in opening and widening the public sphere in Malaysia, China despite restrictive measures from the authoritarian governments who seek to control the flow of information. He stresses the technological ways employed by the citizens in these countries to resist repressive rule especially the techniques of netizens who find ways through China’s Great Firewall and disguise their criticisms of the government in puns.

Under monitoring governance and exposing abuses, Diamond asserts that Liberation technology is an “accountability technology” in that it provides efficient and powerful tools for transparency and monitoring. Briefly, he makes mention of the use of open-sourced software like FrontlineSMS which enables large-scale, two-way text messaging purely via mobile phones which has been used over mobile phone networks to monitor national elections in Ghana and Nigeria, to facilitate rapid reporting of human-rights violations in Egypt, to inform citizens about anti-corruption and human-rights issues in Senegal, and to monitor and report civil unrest in Pakistan.

Diamond’s study of the impact of digital technology or ICT in ensuring freedom barely examines the role it plays in ensuring free and fair elections in both democratic and authoritarian regimes. It is obvious that elections are the bellwether of the sustainability and resilience of any democracy and the role of the ICT and its numerous applications like the social media in either contributing to credible elections or unsuccessful elections deserves a mention and need to be thoroughly investigated.

Even though Diamond’s comprehensive research may have little relevance to this report since it does not cover ICT and elections comprehensively, the role social media and ICT is playing in empowering the citizenry to fight for their own freedom is highly conspicuous in his work.

Farid Shirazi\textsuperscript{10}, bases his study “The Contribution of ICT to Freedom and Democracy: An empirical analysis of archival data on the Middle East” on an empirical analysis of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) archival data for ten Middle Eastern countries: Bahrain, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and United Arab Emirates for the period of 1995-2003.

Using a set of regression analyses, Shirazi’s paper shows that ICT expansion in the Middle East has not only resulted in the bridging of the Digital

\textsuperscript{10} Shirazi, Farid. “The contribution of ICT to freedom and democracy: an empirical analysis of archival data on the middle east”
Divide between the Middle East and developed countries, it has also had a positive impact on promoting democracy and freedom of expression in a region that suffers most from political, social and global conflicts (Freedom House, 2006; Reporters Without Borders, 2005; cited by Shirazi).

What makes Shirazi’s study more relevant to this research is the background demography of the Middle East where he based his study. The Middle East has a lot in common with the African sub-region in terms of political, social and economic challenges. Many countries in the Middle East like Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman just to mention a few are not democratic – Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are constitutional monarchies, Bahrain is a constitutional hereditary monarchy, Qatar is a hereditary monarchy and Oman is an absolute monarchy. Others like Iran are Theocratic Republics, while Syria is a republic under an authoritarian military-dominated regime.

Like the Middle East, the political space in Africa is not well liberalized and democracy is not properly consolidated even in the few countries that have recently adopted democratic rule. Both regions have equally seen periods of relative tolerance and violence.

In spite of the commonalities that these two regions share, it is an open secret that there are major differences between them. For instance, the high number of different ethnic groups and languages in African countries makes them vulnerable to ethnic conflicts and thus makes national cohesion more difficult. Besides, there is a very high literacy rate in the Middle East than in Africa, and therefore, ICT will generally be more embraced in the Middle East than in Africa where few people in the city have the technical knowledge to handle the sometimes sophisticated ICT and its various applications.

Most importantly, Shirazi omits the role social media plays during elections in the Middle East. This may be due to the already-known fact that most countries in the Middle East rarely organize elections because of the non-democratic forms of political organizations or systems of rule they subscribe to. This makes his study partially inadequate in understanding the role of social media in elections in general and African elections in particular.

Alice Munyu’a’s study into the “Perceptions and Misconceptions: The Role of new and traditional media in Kenya’s post-election violence (2007)” is particularly in line with this research. Even though Elections in Kenya have been associated with violence for almost two decades, Munyu’a admits that the tensions escalated as mobile phones and the internet became additional means used for political discussions that took on an ethnic dimension and a political bias on a scale that had not been experienced before. But she was also quick to add that the use of media to spread violence and encourage a particular ideology is not new to Kenya.

Although the role of traditional media and social media is believed to have been significant enough to impact on the levels of violence (both positively and negatively), it was not the defining factor. Hate speech in Kenya was not the responsibility of media alone– on previous occasions it has emanated directly from politicians and government offices. Government propaganda and ineffective dialogue can have a

11 Munyu, Alice; "Perceptions and Misconceptions: The Role of New and Traditional Media in Kenya’s Post-election violence (2007)"
key – even if unintentional – role in encouraging polarization, exacerbating tensions and escalating violence during an election period.

However, Alice Munyua’s characterization or description of the media as not the defining factor is ambiguous and not quite accurate. Whilst it is a truism that politicians and government propaganda or ineffective dialogue can exacerbate tensions and instigate violence, it is undeniable that the media serve as a bridge between high-profile politicians and the masses and therefore speeds up communication between them. Without the media, it would be difficult for especially government propaganda to stoke tensions at the grassroots where normally the violence starts.

Even though, she explains, the old Kenyan constitution guaranteed individual freedom in terms of the freedom of expression and the independence of electronic, print and all other types of media, it did not extend to address issues of ethnic incitement, hate speech, incitement to violence, propaganda for war, incitement to cause harm or content that is discriminatory or amounts to the vilification of others. However, Chapter Four of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution states that the right to freedom of expression does not give anyone a right to use hate speech.

Kenya’s post-election violence demonstrated the effects that new technology can have. Despite a history of violence associated with elections, these were the first elections where mobile phones and access to vernacular radio stations were widely available. Mobile phones and media (including social media) can play the roles of mirroring events and providing an important opportunity for reflection and insight into political dynamics. They can analyze the level of dialogue, the polarization, and progress towards reconciliation, including possible avenues for the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Munyua finally concludes that Kenya’s election violence revealed the role of media, Social media and mobile telephones in fostering the spread of violence; but equally it showed their role in spreading peace-related messages and offering a space for reconciliation.

As expected, the use of hate speech is now a criminal offense under the new 2010 Kenyan constitution following the widespread use of hate speech in the 2007 electoral disputes. Thus, while Munyua’s study into the influence of the ICT and the media in propagating hate speech in a paradigm where the use of hate speech was not a criminal offense, this study would also look into the impact of social media on the Kenya elections under a paradigm where hate speech is now an offense punishable by law. In other words, how would the law or the threat of legal punishment affect the use of Social media in spreading hate speech and inciting violence? Would it be a deterrent or not?

Presley Ifukor12 investigates the role of social media in the 2007 Nigerian Elections in his study: “Elections” or “Selections”? Blogging and Twittering the Nigerian 2007 Elections.” His article examines the linguistic construction of textual messages in the use of blogs and Twitter in the Nigerian 2007 electoral cycle comprising the April 2007 general elections and subsequent rerun elections in April, May and August 2009. By looking at the usage of the medium by government officials, Ifukor describes the lead up to the Nigerian election and it profiles the development of blogging. He also provides

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12 Ifukor, Presley.“Blogging and Twittering the Nigerian 2007 General Elections”.
samples of blogs used by the electorate, specifically those that gave personal accounts of events on Election Day.

He uses a qualitative approach of discourse analysis to present a variety of discursive acts that blogging and microblogging afford social media users during the electoral cycle. His data were culled from 245 blog posts and 923 tweets. An analysis of the data shows that there is a dialectical relationship between social media discourse and the process of political empowerment.

He delves into the discourse used in the blogs and microblogs like Twitter by differentiating the difference between the words ‘select’ and ‘elect’. Ifukor specifically addresses microblogs and weblogs (blogs) as they relate to the 2007 Nigerian election. His questions are based in the political science realm, as he seeks to discover what role these blogs play in political discourse and activities of the 21st century.

The thesis of his study is that citizens’ access to social media electronically empowers the electorates to be actively involved in democratic governance. He posits that electronic empowerment is a direct result of access to social media (and mobile telephony) by more citizens who constitute the electorates. This encourages more public discussions about politics and makes the democratic process more dynamic than in the pre-social media era. Importantly however, he seeks answers to how blogging can challenge autocratic regimes, since much of Africa would fall under this political category.

Ifukor, however, seems to omit the danger blogging and tweeting could cause in the Nigerian elections by inciting violence through provocative messages and vitriolic pronouncements. Though his study provides deep insight into the impact of social media and elections in Africa, It would have been very helpful to this research to know whether or not dangerous speech was used on the social media platform in the Nigerian elections, and how it affected the elections if it was indeed used.

Catherine Bailard (2010)13, a former UCLA PhD student, examines the impact of mobile phones on the corrupt side of the economy in “Mobile Phone Diffusion and Corruption in Africa”. She provides a background in corruption and mobile phone diffusion in Africa, and she employs two empirical analyses to test her hypothesis. She makes use of a fixed regression of data to see if there is any correlation between mobile penetration and perceived corruption scores across 46 African countries between 1999 and 2006. She also adds a critical addition that seeks to “address the endogeneity and misspecification concerns that accompany such cross-country quantitative analyses”.

The study provides insight into the benefits of explosion of mobile phones, the link between democracy and corruption, and the amount of privatization of a nation’s telecom company. She tries to counterbalance certain biases or control for certain factors that may nullify her findings. She explains why Namibia was chosen as her sample country. She also provides guidance on how she selected her variables for the study, and how they interacted with one other.

Finally, Bailard concludes that mobile phones will have a negative impact, thus lessening corruption, by decentralizing information and communication. The diffusion of mobile devices increase the chance of being caught conducting

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13 Bailard, Catherine (October 14, 2010). "Mobile Phone Diffusion and Corruption in Africa".
corrupt practices, as well as creating an environment that provides fewer chances to conduct such practices.

Her study has significance for researching into ICT and democracy in Kenya since Kenya also has seen a dramatic increase in mobile phones and the number of people who use it. Nevertheless, Bailard’s study does not address the explosion of social media and its impact on corruption, let alone elections.

Professor Tim Unwin provides a brilliant resource for discourse in his “Social media and democracy: critical reflections”. He admits the impact of new forms of digital social media in transforming the ways in which many people communicate and share information, especially during the first decade of the 21st century. He however maintains that very little is understood about the effects of the advent of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube, as well as blogging environments and online discussion fora, on political processes. Unwin argues that even though there is a willingness to believe that social media are making political processes more democratic, the evidence to back such assertions is mostly not available.

He places at one extreme those who believe that major political changes, such as those in the Middle East since 2010, are a direct result of the use of social media and therefore terms it as “Facebook Revolution”. At the other extreme, Unwin puts those who see the use of social media and the internet by governments and large private sector corporations as a means of surveillance and maintaining control over citizens.

The aim of Unwin’s paper is threefold: First, to highlight that there is considerable ambivalence in approaches to the role of social media in political processes, particularly with respect to democracies (taking cognizance of Held’s, 2006, important emphasis that there are many different kinds of democracy). His second aim focuses attention particularly on the impacts of social media on the engagement of the poorest and most marginalized in political processes. The third aim emphasizes on the importance for governments to enable all of their citizens to have opportunities to participate in these new forms of political engagement.

Unwin emphasizes from the onset that technology is not an autonomous power that can inherently be used for ‘good’ or ‘bad’. To buttress his point, Unwin refers to evidence in the past where technologies have been shaped and used by those in power to maintain their positions of power (Habermas, 1978; Unwin, 2009). This raises the questions: Are new ICTs actually any different from this? Have they actually created a new information age (Castells, 2000) whereby existing structures and political processes can be fundamentally changed? He argues that there is no simple answer to this.

Unwin concludes with pro-poor sentiments that new technologies are generally not developed by the poor and the marginalized in society. Thus, he continues, if they are to benefit from social media, there needs to be an external entity that would ensure that such technologies can be used in the political, social or economic interest of the poor.

While this is true, it can also be argued that the poor does not need to develop new technologies in order to effect any fundamental change. The success of the Arab Spring did not require the development of any new technology that served the interest of the poor. The popular social media platforms, namely Facebook and Twitter, are available to all and sundry, and as in the Arab Spring, can be used by the masses to effect
fundamental social, economic and political change.

Notably, Unwin makes no reference to how ICT and the new social media affect the electoral process, which is the significant bellwether of the maturity and resiliency of any democracy. It also seems he is particularly skeptical about the impact of ICT and social media in enhancing democracy and thus takes a pessimistic view of the capability of ICT and social media to bring about any fundamental political change, citing the success of social media in the Arab Spring as possibly an isolated case. This is of significant interest to this research, which seeks to assess the impact of social media in either positively or negatively, effecting any fundamental political change through particularly elections.

Thus this research will be particularly important in contributing to the few but growing study into the impact of social media on African elections, and thereby help to broaden our horizon and understanding in the role social media plays in the electoral process and ultimately in the democratic process in Africa.

**3.0 OVERVIEW OF THE 2013 KENYAN GENERAL ELECTIONS**

On March 4, 2013, Kenyans went to the polls by the millions to elect not only their fourth president but also Senators, MPs, City Governors, Women Representatives, county counselors, in one of the most crucial elections the country has held since independence.

It was their first ever elections held after the 2007 post-election disputes which plunged the country into cataclysmic violence and resulted in the death of about 1200 Kenyans with roughly 300,000 displaced, after Mwai Kibaki won over Raila Odinga by an exceedingly narrow margin in an election widely believed to be compromised by irregularities. The 2007 Kenyan elections were unexpectedly marred by violent outbursts caused by allegations of electoral manipulations and fraud. Only 231,728 votes separated the incumbent President Kibaki and the opposition candidate, Mr. Odinga in 2007.

The 2007 election finally ended with a deal to achieve peace and led to the formation of a coalition government where power was shared between the two candidates of the two major parties which locked horns in the 2007 presidential elections – Mwai Kibaki of the People’s National Unity (PNU) was the president whilst his major political opponent in the elections, Raila Odinga, served as the prime minister.

Eight presidential candidates contested in the 2013 Kenyan elections. They were Raila Odinga (Orange Democratic Movement), Uhuru Kenyatta (The National Alliance Party), Mohammed Abduba Dida (Alliance of Real Change) and Musalia Mudavadi (Amani Alliance). The others are Martha Karua (Narc Kenya), Paul Muite (Safina Alliance), James Ole Kiyiapi (Restore and Build Kenya), and Peter Kenneth (Eagle Alliance).

However, the real contest was between the two leading coalition parties: The Coalition of Reform and Democracy (CORD) led by Raila Odinga and The Jubilee Alliance with Uhuru Kenyatta as its flagbearer. Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga are coincidentally the sons of Kenya’s first president, Jomo Kenyatta and vice president, Oginga Odinga respectively.
The campaign trails of the various political parties were as electrifying much as they were occasionally aggressive. A new twist to the general elections was the fact that almost all of the presidential aspirants and not a few of the other political aspirants resorted to social media to win the support of mainly the teeming youth, by posting updates on their campaign activities on their Twitter and Facebook pages.

There were two presidential debates for all the eight presidential candidates on the 11th and 25th of February 2013 respectively. One of the main aims of organizing the debates was to encourage voting along policy or ideological lines instead of ethnic allegiances. The debate afforded Kenyans the opportunity to examine the presidential candidates squarely in order to make informed decisions. Topics discussed on the debate included the minimum wage, alleged corruption in government, land policy, poverty, unemployment and the relocation of persons displaced after the 2007 post-election violence, among others.

3.1 The 2013 Presidential Election

After a close fought contest, Uhuru Kenyatta, who was also one of the deputy prime ministers in the coalition government formed after the 2007-08 disputed polls obtained 50.07% to clinch a first round victory. His major contender, Raila Odinga, came second with 43.31%. Kenyatta surpassed the 50-percent level needed to avoid a runoff by just over 8,000 votes out of 12.3 million votes cast.
Kenyatta won 6,173,433 votes — 50.07 percent — to Odinga's 5,340,546 — 43.3 percent. More than 12, 330,000 votes were cast, with a record turnout of 86 percent registered voters.\(^\text{14}\)

Figure 3.5: Supporters of Uhuru Kenyatta jubilate after the IEBC declares him president

The electronic tallying of the votes was however marred by technical hitches, and this forced the IEBC to resort to manual tallying of the votes.\(^\text{15}\)

After the declaration of the results, Raila Odinga issued a statement alleging multiple failures in the election's integrity that he said has put Kenyan democracy on trial. Refusing to accept defeat, Prime Minister Raila Odinga said the election process experienced multiple failures as he announced plans to petition the Supreme Court.

Odinga, however, asked for calm and for Kenyans to love one another. Many believe his call for calm amongst his supporters contributed towards preventing a recurrence of the 2007-08 post-election violent outbursts, which led to both human and property loss.

Unsurprisingly, there were minor skirmishes in the wake of Kenyatta's victory which included youths setting tires on fire in the western city of Kisumu, Odinga's home region. However, there was no report or confirmation of any major violence around Kenya.

The Government, security agencies, NGOs and CSOs had all been working around the clock to prevent a repeat of the postelection violence that brought Kenya to the edge of civil war five years ago, when many people were forced from their homes after President MwaiKibaki — a Kikuyu like Kenyatta — was pronounced the winner over Odinga, a Luo.

3.2 The Supreme Court upholds Kenyatta’s victory

Raila Odinga lodged an appeal to the Supreme Court to contest the electoral outcome after refusing to accept defeat, on the grounds that the election was flawed and marred by technical problems citing “rampant illegality” in the electoral process.\(^\text{16}\)

Kenya's Supreme Court upheld Uhuru Kenyatta's presidential election victory, rejecting several petitions challenging the vote after reviewing the recount of 22 polling stations, which the court ordered.

Chief Justice Willy Mutungu announced the decision, which was unanimous, saying the poll was free and fair. He said that Mr. Kenyatta and


\(^\text{15}\) Mosoku, Geoffrey; Obala, Roselyne (March 06 2013).”Machines failure IEBC’s biggest headache in poll” [http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000078763&story_title=n-a](http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000078763&story_title=n-a)

Mr. Ruto had been "validly elected" in a poll carried out in a "free, fair, transparent and credible" manner.17

Figure 3.6: Supporters of Raila Odinga outside the Courthouse furious over the verdict of the Supreme Court

"The court has now spoken," Odinga said, "I wish the president-elect and his team well." Raila Odinga’s acceptance of defeat brought to a close weeks of uncertainty following the March 4 Kenya elections.

The president-elect made a televised victory speech, hours after the announcement, vowing to work with and serve all Kenyans "without any discrimination whatsoever".

The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) had insisted that the vote was credible, despite technical failures with an electronic voter ID system and the vote counting mechanism.

International observers said the poll was largely free, fair and credible, and that the electoral commission had conducted its business in an open and transparent manner.

3.3 The Threat of Ethnic Confrontation

Ethnic rivalries fed 2007’s fighting, which damaged the image of the east African country, the region's most powerful economy and a key ally in the U.S.-led war against militant Islam in the region.

A repeat of the inter-tribal violence that bloodied the 2007 elections lingered in the light of mounting tension and verbal attacks in the 2013 elections. The death of about 116 people between August and September on Kenya’s coastline in tribal violence as the elections neared heightened the tension and compounded the hostile political climate.

Ethnic-based alliances also added to the rising tensions. The two main opposing camps were the Coalition for Reform and Democracy (CORD) and The Jubilee Alliance. Prime Minister Raila Odinga, who was backed by Vice President Kalonzo Musyoka, led the former and Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta whose running mate was William Ruto, a former cabinet minister headed the latter.

What is more, these alliances forged by Kenya's main presidential contenders for the 2013 vote led

17 BBC, (March 30, 2013). "Kenya Supreme Court upholds Uhuru Kenyatta election win"
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21979298
to a rerun of a largely ethnic-based contest for political power since these new alliances were formed to a large extent around ethnic groups. This raised the possibility of another ethnic confrontation and tribal conflicts akin to the 2007-08 aftermath since it bred the unhealthy “us versus them” attitude.

The head-on rivalry between Kenyatta, who hails from the predominant Kikuyu tribe, and Odinga, a Luo, intensified the threat of ethnic confrontation due to the age-old tension between the two tribes.

Thus, while there were indications that there would likely be much fewer incidents of violence, Kenya was much more fractured and a possible repeat of the inter-tribal violence that sullied the 2007 elections lurked around in the light of such unhealthy ethnic-based alliances which compounded the typical election tension.

Contributing to the tensions, both Kenyatta and Ruto were indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague for their alleged role in fomenting the election violence in the 2007 general elections.

3.4 The Impact of the New Constitution

The election was also the first under the new constitution that was adopted in 2010. Among other things, the new constitution was expected to stave off a repetition of the bloodletting aftermath of the 2007-08 elections.

The passage of the new constitution in August 2010 introduced sweeping changes to the political system, including: the creation of a new devolved system of government that transfers authority for many government functions from the national level to 47 newly-created counties; reduced presidential powers; the introduction of a bicameral system of government; the introduction of majority and minority parties in the national assembly; a more defined separation of powers between the three branches of government; electoral reforms; a restructured judiciary; security sector and land reforms; affirmative action for under-represented groups; and an expanded bill of rights.

Unlike the 2007, the new constitution established a more independent electoral institution, and also restructured the judiciary to make it more autonomous. These measures were greatly influential in minimizing the specter of violence and ensured peaceful, transparent, free and fair elections

3.4.1 The New Constitution encouraged Ethnic Alliance and Loyalty

Kenya, like many other African countries, usually votes by ethnic alignments and loyalty without any regard for issue-based manifestoes that the presidential aspirants and their parties come up with. This necessitated the forming of multi-ethnic alliances: Raila and his running mate, Vice-President Kalonzo Musyoka, were arch rivals for long time while Uhuru and his running mate William Ruto were in opposite camps during the 2007 election.

The alliances formed were necessary because no single ethnic-based support is large enough to guarantee a candidate over 50% of the votes needed to clinch a victory due to the constitutional provision which states that a winner must have to obtain 50% plus 1 vote.

Thus, this idealistic and finely constructed constitutional provision, despite its merits in uniting age-old political archrivals who hail from different ethnic backgrounds and thus bringing
together ethnic groups, unwittingly rearranged Kenyans into ethnic blocs for the sake of political advantage. Hence, instead of reducing the role of tribalism in the elections, the constitution inadvertently encouraged it.

Richard Dowden, who writes for *African Arguments*, part of the Guardian African Network, rightly noted that while the constitution prescribes democracy, transparency, good governance and idealism, *this election was all about personal and tribal loyalties.*

### 3.5 The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC)

The new constitution adopted by Kenyans in 2010 created among other things a more independent electoral body. The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) in its noble quest for peaceful and a highly transparent election worked around the clock to put in place pragmatic measures and policies. These measures were geared towards significantly enhancing civic participation and increasing voter turnout and enthusiasm in the whole exercise.

**Figure 3.8: IEBC Chairman Issack Hassan**

The commission was bent on making the entire process easy and friendly to all so as to engage and include each and every Kenyan in the decisive process of choosing their leaders. With the help of Google, the commission launched an [interactive map](http://www.iebc.or.ke/) and SMS service for people to effortlessly find their voter registration stations, registration status, and polling station on Election Day. It also included a candidate finder. The map proved to be a useful resource for citizens and it served as a commendable model for other independent electoral commissions.

The commission employed this innovative technology to make the process exceedingly smooth, highly transparent and more credible.

The IEBC laid bare its core activities and operations to the public by outlining its mission, vision and their constitutional mandate on their captivating website before the elections. The Commission also listed the following as their core values on its website: Independence, Team Work, Innovativeness, Professionalism, Integrity and Accountability.

The Commission’s website therefore afforded the Kenyan people the privilege to peer into what the

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19 [http://www.iebc.or.ke/](http://www.iebc.or.ke/)
IEBC will be involved in and what they intend to achieve during the elections. Thus, voters were armed with vital information with which they could monitor, scrutinize and measure the operations and performance of the commission in relation to their own objectives.

Moreover, the IEBC regularly provided updates of the elections on their website to keep voters well informed. Reports on almost all the election proceedings – from registration through voting procedures to the Supreme Court ruling – were timely made available on the commission’s official website.

Throughout the elections, the IEBC opened its doors to both ordinary Kenyans and election monitoring organizations to feel free in reporting any potential or actual incidents of polling center bias or skirmishes. The commission was not only alert to but also responded swiftly to polling station misunderstandings and skirmishes that is highly characteristic of any tension-fraught major elections.

The commission is determined to win the trust of Kenyans in all its undertakings and particularly in the handling of electoral disputes. This is important in ensuring that disgruntled electorates can place absolute confidence in the body to resolve matters fairly rather than resorting to violence or taking matters into their own hands.

The commission’s Facebook page was also informative. It proved helpful for Kenyan’s active internet users and particularly the social media-inclined youth. The commission made sure that all up-to-date information relevant to the elections was made available on their Facebook page so that voters would be well informed about the electoral process. People with unsettling questions could also seek clarification from the commission through their Facebook page.

The IEBC however faced some difficulties in the discharge of their mandate. Technical hitches that marred polling and tallying of votes topped the list of challenges IEBC faced in conducting this year’s General Election. In the urban polling stations in Central Isiolo, more than 75 per cent of the machines failed to work, forcing the IEBC officials to switch to the manual system.20 The machines, known as Electronic Voter Identification Devices (EVID), malfunctioned in most parts of the country, which compelled the IEBC to revert to the use of manual register to identify voters. The most commonly reported causes for this failure were password issues and batteries, which died.

**Figure 3.9: IEBC Officials revert to manual identification of voters**

The election officials switched to the manual method due to the breakdown in the Electronic Voter Identification Devices (EVID) and this resulted in late voting in most parts of the country. Election officials took the flak from agents and observers when most of the registered voters at

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polling centres in the towns had still not cast their vote in the afternoon.

Moreover, though the presiding officers were provided with electronic gadgets, including mobile phones, to be used to relay presidential results to the National Tallying Centre at Bomas of Kenya, the systems failed only five hours after tallying had begun countrywide leading to massive delays in filing results.

Figure 3.10: IEBC admits problems with vote tallying (left)

3.6 CSOs and NGOs in the Kenyan Elections

Throughout the elections, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) scampered and scurried frantically across every corner of the country to educate the people on the need to maintain peace before, during and after the elections.

Apart from making good use of the radio and television to send their message across, many CSOs and NGOs also targeted the numerous social media aficionados through mainly Twitter and Facebook and tailored their message to suit them.

Many civil society organizations (CSOs) and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were doing everything within their power to ensure violent-free elections in the tension-filled general elections.

The Elections Observation Group (ELOG), a domestic monitoring organization is a coalition of 10 civil society organizations (CSOs) that independently monitored the electoral and political processes. The coalition includes The Centre for Governance and Development (CGD), The Constitution and Reform Education Consortium (CRECO) and The Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya (FIDA Kenya), just to mention a few.

ELOG trained 7240 citizen observers who were stationed at randomly selected number of polling stations during the entire Election Day. They reported on the conduct and the results of the election via SMS.

ELOG’s website, Facebook page and Twitter served as good resources to follow for a trustworthy report on the elections.

Another NGO that demonstrably showed tremendous interest in the 2013 Kenyan Elections was NDI. NDI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. It complemented the efforts of ELOG to improve its ability to function as a permanent, nonpartisan domestic election monitoring body. NDI assisted ELOG to use scientific methods and new technologies to improve the speed and impact of its election monitoring.

Besides assisting political parties to improve their understanding of the needs and priorities of Kenyan citizens to develop representative, issue-based policy platforms, NDI has also been helping women and young people to overcome barriers to political participation.
3.7 The Influence of Technology, Social Media and Social Apps

Social Media, particularly Facebook and Twitter were extensively utilized by Kenyans. Due to its sheer affordability and easy accessibility, thanks to the proliferation of affordable smart phones in the Kenya market (majority of Kenyans access internet through their phones), many Kenyans relied on Social media for news updates since it provided timely and up-to-the-minute news tit bits on especially issues related to the elections. Political candidates also used media to connect with their supporters, especially the youth.

The 2013 Kenya national election has been described as the most hi-tech in the history of Kenya elections and by extension African elections. Technology and social media were utilized in an unprecedented scale. The influence of Technology and Social Media also necessitated the introduction of many election-related apps that went a very long way to enhance the electoral process.

They included games and SMS-based apps which encouraged a peaceful election process, and crowd-sourced incident reporting sites which also proved important throughout the elections, with developers reaching out to include all segments of society across Kenya. Some of the apps were: The Google Elections Hub, Kenya Election Youtube Channel, Election Kenya Portal, Track All, The IEBC’s interactive map and The Election Thief App Game, among others.

The Kenya Elections Hub was launched by Google Kenya to facilitate the dissemination of information related to the country’s elections. The Hub operated via an online portal where all members of society, whether in a personal or official capacity, accessed information regarding the elections, including news updates, information on candidates and campaigns, and prevalent trends across the country.

Kenyans and the world accessed live streams on elections after Google and Storyful launched Kenya Election 2013, a dedicated channel on YouTube that curated election-related content across the video-streaming site. By maintaining a dedicated YouTube channel for the Kenya 2013 elections, news, views and grassroots citizen reporting from the election trail was brought together by Storyful in one convenient online portal, with playlists capturing some of the most important democratic themes.

Al Jazeera English also had a great interactive dashboard with candidate information, boundaries, its interactive SMS ‘Speak’ platform that allowed citizen voices to be heard, and also introduced an interactive poll data.

Ushahidi, the citizen-reporting organization also launched the Uchaguzi project. The purpose of the project was “putting citizens back at the heart of the electoral process." Uchaguzi, which means "elections" in Swahili, served as a platform that enabled citizens to monitor the electoral process by reporting issues such as intimidation, hate speech, and polling clerk bias among others.

There were lots of candidate finder sites for the Kenya election. One that seemed to have attracted most attention is Wenyenchi that also had a mobile site and an Android app. It provided a good overview of political candidates and an electoral boundary-finder.

3.8 What made the elections successful?

Apart from the new constitution that created highly autonomous political structures essential for free and fair elections and particularly vital for
democratic consolidation, the civil society organizations (CSOs), the media, the government, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) NGOs and the introduction of technological devices all contributed to the success of the Kenyan elections.

The Kenyan Elections Observation Group’s (ELOG) first-hand reportage on the conduct of voters and polling clerks by their well-trained citizen observers contributed towards ensuring transparency. The transmission of the results of the election by these same observers via SMS also provided credible information to individuals, organizations, institutions and other stakeholders in the electoral process.

The excellent role played by the Kenyan media in ensuring smooth and transparent elections cannot be gainsaid. Effective civic education through both the print and broadcast media went a long way to enlighten the voting public on the 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' of voting, as well as the dangers and penalties of electoral malpractices. This undoubtedly contributed to the successful elections in no small way as people were repeatedly sensitized on the importance of political tolerance, the stoking effects of vitriolic speeches, and supremely the need to safeguard, protect and maintain the priceless national peace and unity they have striven hard to achieve so as to prevent another unnecessary mayhem.

The tireless efforts by the Kenyan government, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), and the ministry of information in purging both the traditional and social media of any hate and dangerous speech also bore much fruit. Vitriolic speeches were significantly minimized and the use of the mobile phones in sending provocative messages was drastically curtailed if not completely eliminated.

The independent electoral and boundaries commission (IEBC) likewise did a yeoman's job by playing a pivotal role in averting any awkward tendency towards conflict by acting swiftly in fulfilling their constitutional mandate. The IEBC did not discharge its duties with fear or favor, but with the highest sense of professionalism, decorum, candor and remarkable evenhandedness.

Technology and the use of social media also featured prominently in the elections. The Internet and particularly social media were highly instrumental in ensuring that this election was one of the most transparent elections in recent years in the political history of Kenya. Many Kenyans followed election proceedings keenly and were quick to draw the attention of people on social media to any polling clerk bias or suspicion of electoral fraud. The social media itself was thoroughly monitored by the government in collaboration with technological firms to ensure that the platform was free from any inflammatory postings and incendiary comments that could exacerbate tensions.

Kenyans on Twitter (#KOT) judiciously utilized social media to address bad press and curtail sensational reportage by especially the foreign media. A case in point is the CNN’s infamous report that armed militiamen in the Rift Valley were preparing for war. Kenyans on Twitter (#KOT) did not hesitate to condemn the seemingly irresponsible reportage on particularly Twitter, forcing the giant media house to withdraw the report from the airwaves and subsequently remove it from their website.

Most importantly, the youth especially, made very good use of Facebook and Twitter to appeal to their colleagues and fellow Kenyans to exercise
restraint in their speech and conduct in order to safeguard and maintain peace and unity.

Brief soothing messages like “let’s give peace a chance”, “peace is paramount”, “We have only one country, let us protect it” “vote wisely, vote for peace” among others were commonplace on Twitter and Facebook pages of many Kenyans.

All the above measures and actions went a long way to ensure relative calm, peace and success in the Kenya elections, thereby partly salvaging the once-glorious image of the East African country that was sadly but badly dented in the country’s 2007-08 elections.

3.9 Challenges Ahead

Though the elections are over, Kenya still faces many challenges. One of the major challenges the new president, Kenyatta and his team, will face is to rescue Kenya from the dungeon of economic doldrums in which the country finds itself. The Economic Survey 2012 released by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Planning showed that the economy slowed from 5.8 per cent to 4.4 per cent last year.21 There should be a major focus on the economy especially job creation and other aspects of development like infrastructure development, an issue that received significant attention during the elections campaign.

Aside economic challenges, it seems the new administration will take over a very polarized and fractious country due to the slim margin of victory and an already-existing ethnic division. This is especially so in the case where the defeated CORD party led by Odinga contested the integrity of the voting and counting process in the court. Therefore, the task of building a united Kenya and breaking down the tribal rivalries will be extremely daunting for the new administration. The ethnic divisions remain a key barrier to Kenya’s economic takeoff and certainly needs to be a priority on the new government’s scale of preference if it is actually committed to building a better Kenya.

Furthermore, the country is bound to be challenged by the intervention of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Both the president-elect and his vice face charges of crimes against humanity alleged by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for their conduct in the 2007 post-election violence. Kenyatta faces trial in July at the International Criminal Court over allegations he orchestrated the murder, forcible deportation, persecution and rape of Odinga's supporters in the aftermath of the 2007 vote.

Kenyatta, as president, may have to spend the first half of his presidency in a courtroom in The Hague since the trial could take years. Thus, the new leaders will have to find a way to fulfill their enormous task of governing the country and fulfilling their campaign promises without being distracted by the expected pressure and nudging by the ICC.

There is also a ‘bad blood’ created by the intervention of foreign governments. The United States previously warned of "consequences" if Kenyatta wins. The United States, Britain and the European Union gave Kenya's new political era a cold reception. After Kenyatta was declared as president-elect, all released statements congratulating the Kenyan people but none mentioned Kenyatta by name.

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The West had made it clear before the vote that it would not welcome a President Kenyatta. Britain has said it would have only essential contact with Kenyatta as president. However, US president Barack Obama, Britain Prime Minister David Cameron and French President Francois Hollande all congratulated Kenyatta after the Supreme Court upheld his victory.

The West’s seemingly disappointment with the election of a man accused of playing a direct role in the unfortunate 2007 post-election clashes can have serious political and economic implications for the country. The cordial relationship that exists between Kenya and the West could be affected.

The bold election of Uhuru Kenyatta by the Kenyans seems to emphasize that Kenyans know what is good for them and would not want to be dictated to by Western powers. Once the majority has voted for the man they believe in, it is almost certain that they will stick with him through thick and thin to propel their country to the height of political stability and economic prosperity with or without Western support.

4.0 THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE 2013 KENYAN ELECTIONS

Social media is gradually eroding the monopolistic influence of both the print and broadcast media, namely radio and television, in the airwaves of Kenya. Gone are the days when the radio, television and newspapers served as the only channel for the dissemination of information not only in Kenya but the whole world. In Kenya especially, Social Media is eroding the dominant influence of the traditional media in churning out news and is gaining a great reputation for a cheap and timely access to relevant information.

This is probably due to the high accessibility to the Internet and the increase in the number of Internet users in Kenya. Kenyan Internet users increased by 95.63 % in 2011 showing a tremendous growth in the country’s technology fuelled by high number of mobile phone usage, reveals the Communication Commission of Kenya, CCK, 2011/2012-sector report.

The Communication Commission of Kenya also reports in the first quarter of the 2012/13 Financial Year (July – September 2012) that the number of Internet subscriptions in Kenya grew to 8.5 million compared to 7.7 million users in the previous quarter representing a 10.2 percent increase. In total, the estimated number of Internet users stood at 13.53 million. The use of Internet has been on a rising trend, with the figure showing that with 34.2 per cent of the population accessing the Internet mainly via the mobile phone.

In the quarterly statistics report for the first quarter of the 2012/13 Financial Year (July – September 2012), released by Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK), the market had 30.4 million mobile subscribers as at 30th September 2012 up from 29.7 million in the three months preceding July 2012. Kenya now boasts a mobile penetration of 77.2 per cent. This growth can also be attributed to competitive tariffs, special offers and promotions offered to subscribers by operators.  

22 Mobile penetration in the country continues to increase
Many people believe that Social Media was less utilized in the turbulent 2007-08 Kenyan elections. Therefore, some analysts conclude that it is not partly to be blamed for the violence that destabilized Kenya and soiled its image in 2007. Web-enabled mobile phones were too costly back then and were mostly used by the rich and the elites. Ordinary Kenyans mostly relied on the popular traditional media, newspapers and radio, for information. Others also think it is somewhat culpable despite its limited use in the events leading up to the post-election violence.

But there has been a great change in the landscape since 2008. Web-enabled technological devices are no longer the preserve of the rich. More and more people are now enjoying the use of smart phones and tablets. “On buses, in restaurants, in churches, and even in rural areas, it is not unusual to see smart phones and tablets on display and in use,” noted Frederick Nzwili, who is a Correspondent for The Christian Science Monitor. This phenomenon is attributable to the abolition of the 16% sales tax on mobile phones and the influx of cheap mobile phones into the market which has given most Kenyans, especially the youth, easy access to mobile phones and by extension access to internet and social media since it is an open secret that most Kenyans access the internet via their phones.

It therefore comes as no surprise that Kenyans profoundly relied on social media to have a glimpse of the unfolding political events as the country braced itself through the general elections. In the lead up to the general elections, Kenyans reexamined the power of political choice, and the country acted as a laboratory for how social media can break up the country by churning out untruths and fuelling tensions with snide tribal remarks or make up the country by helping ease and balance transitions of power in demanding times.

Since smart phones are now affordable and access to the Internet is on an all-time high, it is no wonder that social media featured prominently in the 2013 Kenyan elections.

Social media - tweets, tags, pokes, posts, upload – can carry both peaceful and hateful messages. It has the potential to divide and to unite. This begs the question: Would the influence of social media in the Kenyan elections bring any positive change to Kenya?

Even though the use of social media incredibly spiked, especially among politically active youths, the effect of social media was not clear, Frederick Nzwili observes. “Quick access to information, and instant interaction, is something new”, He added. It therefore remained to be seen how well Kenyans would handle this new media especially in such a critical election period.

With tension running high and candidates fiercely battling it out at the hustings, nothing could surpass the role that social media played in swaying people’s opinions about the candidates and their political parties. The advent of social media is slowly sidelining the mean mainstream media in Kenya, as many people are now relying on Facebook posts and pages, twitter and other social media sites for news.

John Omondi, a Facebook user, was just one of several Kenyans who had unreservedly switched

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from the traditional media to the modern social media, particularly Facebook, for news feed. He said:

“I no longer rely much on the local media when it comes to political news in the country because they are skewed in their news delivery, and divided along ethnic lines just like your everyday villager. If I want news about ODM (Orange Democratic Movement) or TNA (The National Alliance), for instance, I simply check their respective face book pages or websites.” 24

“I get real time news about their events rather than waiting for the nine o’clock news or the following morning for a newspaper,” he added.

Internet based interest concerning the elections were very extensive, according to Google. The company’s Zeitgeist (a tool that aggregates search queries Google receives) reported that, the country’s Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) topped the list of the most popular search words in Kenya across 2012, and hinted that all the major Kenyan political candidates also had a strong presence across the various social media outlets. This was an indication that many members of the Kenyan society were increasingly turning to the Internet for election-based information.

4.1 The Power of Social Media

According to Morgan et al, “Social media are media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. Social media uses web-based technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogues.” 25

Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content." 26 A common thread running through all definitions of social media is a blending of technology and social interaction for the co-creation of value. (Morgan et al, 2010)

Put simply, Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. 27 It depends on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, cocreate, discuss, and modify user-generated content. (H. Kietzmann, Jan; Kristopher Hermkens, 2011). 28

Social Media, from the least common ones like flickr, digg, upcoming, Technorati, MySpace, to the most popular ones like Youtube, Facebook and Twitter can either have positive effects or disastrous consequences if not properly monitored

24 Apollo, Joab “KENYA: The Power of Social Media in Kenyan Election”http://mi.q4news.com/node/71493

25 Nigel Morgan; Graham Jones; Ant Hodges (November 8, 2010). “The Complete Guide To Social Media; From the Social media Guys”


and regulated. Social media has the inherent potential to reach thousands of audience within a matter of seconds easily and faster than even the radio and television.

During critical times of elections, Social media can provide another avenue where unscrupulous politicians and supporters can spread hate speech, propagate falsehood, and insidiously incite their members to violence.

Since Ethnic animosities is almost already rooted in the political history of Kenya like many other African countries, the canker can be aggravated by the proliferation of social media which eases and hastens the transmission of hate and vitriolic speeches and can incite millions of audiences to take action within seconds. This was previously impossible in the recent past when technology was limited to radio and television.

To be fair, Social Media can nevertheless play a vital role in exposing potentially violent comments and actions before they get out of hand. The new media spawns a chain of genuine and unbiased news reports, which is aided by the contribution of countless selfless individuals, and is therefore casting the traditional mainstream media who are sometimes prejudiced in their reporting due to their ideological stance and political leanings to the periphery.

Social media is gradually outpacing the mainstream media in terms of churning out up-to-the-minute news. Whilst the radio and television have specific times for news program, social media provides a 24-hour official and unofficial news channel. As more and more people gradually switch to this new media for information and spend more time on this new virtual social platform (Nielson, 2012)\textsuperscript{29}, it is high time its role in the political landscape is investigated.

The importance of social media in occasionally disseminating information on the state of affairs and thereby sensitizing the public on the activities concerning the management of state resources, the action and inaction of state actors and the direction of the country can never be discounted.

Indeed, Social Media is a powerful tool, a double-edged sword that has the potential to throw a wrench into the electoral process by speeding up and spreading wide the transmission of provocative messages, or enhance the electoral process by uncovering electoral fraud or manipulation, exposing corruption and making relevant institutions and officials more accountable.

4.2 The increase in mobile phones and the upsurge of Social Media in Kenya

The upsurge in the number of people using social media in Kenya is attributed to the abolition of 16% sales tax on mobile phones. This means most Kenyans, especially the youth, easily access the internet through their cell phones. In 2007, there were just 8 million mobile users. Now, there are more than 30 million. The \textit{2nd quarter report} of 2011/2012, released by The Communication Commission of Kenya (CCK) indicates that the number of Internet users has grown from 8.89 million users in 2010 to 17.38 million as at December 2012, thanks to the proliferation of affordable cell phones through which most Kenyans access the internet. The internet penetration (per population) is incredibly 28.0% according to \texttt{www.internetworldstats.com}.

\textsuperscript{29}"State of the media: The social media report 2012", \textit{Featured Insights, Global, Media + Entertainment}.
According to this same report released in October 2012 by the CCK, while internet usage via traditional computers grew by 19.2% to 7.7 million users, mobile phone internet usage grew by 1.7% to 29.7 million users. This clearly accounts for the increase in the people using social media in Kenya.

The reduction in the cost of mobile phones occasioned by the abolition of the sales tax on mobile phones has benefited Kenyan youth immensely. Many of them have been able to acquire cell phones regardless of their economic standing.

“My phone is my source of news and any information I need,” said Anne Kirugu, a University student. 30

“Whenever I want to know what’s happening in the country, I simply log in to face book. Most people, especially this election period, provide updates about what people say in rallies. They even post pictures. To me it’s an idea whose time has come,” said Kimaru Maritim, a high school teacher.

It is estimated that a high percentage of web access in Kenya is through mobile phones. A study released by a Kenya-based research firm, Consumer Insight, on mobile telephone use among East African youth shows that they spend billions of shillings monthly on airtime purchase. The study covered 3,600 youth aged between 7-24 in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. According to the study, Kenyan youth topped the list with a monthly expenditure of $38 million (Sh3.4 billion), followed by Uganda and Tanzania at $20 million (Sh1.8 billion) and $12 million (Sh1.1 billion) respectively.

The rate at which the popularity of social media, mainly blogs, Facebook and Twitter is increasing in Kenya is remarkable. With the explosion in social media that has occurred since the last elections in 2007/08, the recent 2013 Kenyan elections was brought to the world, in close to real time, via social media for the first time ever.

The bloggers especially solidified their presence in Kenya during the elections and were giving the

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30 Apollo, Joab “KENYA: The Power of Social Media in Kenyan Election” http://m.iq4news.com/node/71493

Figure 4.1: Map showing Kenya and its geographical boundaries

Figure 4.2: Social Media in Kenya – Facebook, Twitter, Blogs- on a rising trend
local media houses a stiff competition in terms of churning out news. A number of Kenyan media houses responded well by opening up microblogging platforms such as Facebook pages and Twitter Handles for their programmes to enable their readers get news in real time. For instance, KTN (Kenya Television Network) uses the Twitter handle @KTNKenya, Citizen TV Kenya uses @citizentvkenya and NTV Kenya has @ntvkenya as their Twitter handle. Others include K24 TV (@K24Tv), The Standard Digital (@StandardKenya) and Capital FM Kenya (@CapitalFM_kenya), Just to mention a few.

But the bloggers seemed to enjoy a comparatively massive audience. “The reason we have a large audience unmatched by these media houses is because we tell the truth. We report it as it is and do not go into the bed with politicians. We cannot be manipulated,” A blogger, who did not want to be identified due to the controversial nature of his blog, told IQ4News.31

“The government is up in arms against our work, but we will not relent. We are serving our country,” he added.

The country boasts of 739 blogs, following closely Nigeria and South Africa with 1,351 and 9,352 respectively, according to Agrigator, Africa’s main blog aggregator.32

Besides the numerous blogs, Kenya has 1,886,560 Facebook users today, at position 67 in the world according to SocialBakers, a network monitoring and analysis company. However, www.internetworldstats.com put the number of Kenyan Facebook users at 2,045,900 as at 31st December 2012. While this number represents a mere 5 percent of the population, nearly 20 percent of Kenyans online use Facebook, ranking Kenya 67th in global Facebook engagement.

Kenya is named as the country with the second most active twitter users in Africa by “How Africa Tweets”, a research by UK based media firm, Tweetsmister that teamed up with Portland. According to Tweetsmister, Kenya recorded 24,761,800 tweets by the fourth quarter of the year 2012, coming second to South Africa33. Kenya, East Africa's biggest economy, out-tweeted oil-producing powerhouse Nigeria, and Egypt where social media helped galvanize supporters of the Arab Spring revolution.

This seems to be the first time a Kenyan election has played out on Twitter with #KOT (Kenyans on Twitter) being the dominant hashtag for the elections. This year’s election has solidified Kenyan’s position not only as one of Africa’s top tweeting countries but as one of the top social media-oriented nations in Africa and the world.

**4.2.1 Social Media at its full potential in Kenya**

Due to the upsurge of social media and its obvious impact on the Kenya elections, SocialPRO, a social media group, has announced it is planning to film a documentary to highlight the use of social media in Kenya which would be released in April after the dust on the elections have settled.

The documentary would be expected to showcase outstanding social media cases, influencers, and key people and organisations, as well as memorable events

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31 Apollo, Joab “KENYA: The Power of Social Media in Kenyan Election” http://m.iq4news.com/node/71493

32 Apollo, Joab “KENYA: The Power of Social Media in Kenyan Election” http://m.iq4news.com/node/71493

33 Apollo, Joab “KENYA: The Power of Social Media in Kenyan Election” http://m.iq4news.com/node/71493
that have made significant contributions in Kenya, SocialPRO said.34

The documentary, to be dubbed “The Social Kenyans”, will interview social media icons, developers, bloggers, artists, industry analysts and users.

The announcement seems to put significant emphasis on the idea that the power of social media is at its full potential in Kenya, as on several occasions Kenyan topics have trended worldwide by means of social media.

4.3 Illiteracy and the Internet/Social Media in Kenya

Africa has one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world. In Kenya, the rate of illiteracy (those over 15 years who cannot read and write) hovers around 22%. For a country of about 44 million people, this is particularly high. It means that more than 9 million of the population is totally or partially unable to read and write.

However, the literacy rate in Kenya among people below 20 years of age is over 70%, as the first 8 years of primary school are provided tuition-free by the government. In January 2008, the government began offering a restricted program of free secondary education. Literacy is much higher among the young than the old population. Most of this literacy, however, is elementary and not secondary or advanced.35

Even though, Kenya is comparatively better in the African sub-region in terms of illiteracy rates, the country has a long way to go when it is paired with the rest of the world where in most cases illiteracy has been reduced to its barest minimum. For instance, the country is ranked 135th out of 194 countries in the world in terms of Literacy Rates.

People who lack basic reading and writing skills find it extremely difficult to make good use of new technology. The new information and communication technologies thrive on the ability to process information and to give and take relevant instructions, which these gadgets or devices are programmed to respond to.

For illiterates, interpreting the somewhat-technical instructions from these technological devices like the computers and the mobile phones, and responding to them to achieve the desired results - creating a meaningful content or co-creating value - can be a very difficult and daunting exercise. Nevertheless, some technological devices can be easy to use even by the uneducated. Many illiterates use the mobile phone, though for mainly making and receiving calls.

In developing countries where the rate of illiteracy is incredibly high, the use of modern information and communication technology in shaping the national agenda through civic participation is at its lowest ebb. Unlike the advanced countries where due to the far lower illiteracy rates, the majority of the population easily access and make good use of the Internet in all spheres of human endeavor including politics, the situation in developing countries, and precisely Kenya, is just the opposite.

In Kenya, few educated people, namely the elites and the semi-educated in mostly the urban areas, are the ones who are taking advantage of the convenience, the opportunity and the political platform that new technology now affords. To

35 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literacy#Kenya)
The number of Internet users in Kenya stood at 16.2 million by December 31 last year, an 11.6 percent growth from the 14.5 million users recorded at the end of September 2012. According to new data from the Communications Commission of Kenya, Internet penetration in the country went up by 4.3 percent to 41.1 percent in the last quarter of last year (the second quarter of the 2012/2013 financial year).

Though these figures look impressive on the surface, a deeper analysis of them reveals a stark contrast. What is more, the figures show that the total number of Internet users in Kenya is far less than half of the population of this East African country. Whereas other factors may account for this, it is axiomatic that the high rate of illiteracy in the country is a major cause.

Nevertheless, the number of people who use the Internet in Kenya is steadily rising. Aside the fact that Kenya’s Internet population is rapidly increasing, the current netizens in the country have proven to be some of the most articulate and highly vocal users of the Internet and specifically Social Media.

As we would see later in this research in more details, the few urban-dwelling literate Kenyans have utilized the Internet and Social Media to achieve a significant number of successes on the country’s socio-economic and political landscape – from registering their displeasure against unpopular government policies, through organizing peaceful demonstration against extravagant parliamentarians’ salaries to – not least – marshaling support for victims of natural disasters.

In fact, the tech-savvy Kenyans and active social media users have been able to champion the interests of the entire country, particularly the illiterate and non-technologically savvy majority who have little or no voice in the political process. They have become a voice for the voiceless and a mouthpiece for the politically disengaged and this is evidenced in the number of social media users during the recently held elections.

Kenyans online community who are mostly well-informed, knowledgeable, and influential, occasionally whip up the interest of the masses in national affairs and regularly build up their enthusiasm in either supporting or challenging government policies, programmes and projects.

The more politically inclined internet users lead the charge not only in protesting government policies but also in encouraging civic participation, initiating debates and organizing political dialogues. Undoubtedly, their pontifications about national issues hold sway on the minds of ordinary citizens who mostly find no problem at all in lending their unflinching support to any cause they champion. In this way, they are able to influence the non-tech savvy, ill-informed and uneducated class to a large extent not only in political matters but also in the social and economic spheres of the country.
4.4 Kenya Politicians and Social Media

Kenyan Politicians and their various political parties have recognized the importance of social media in building a strong link between themselves and their supporters, influencing public opinion, reaching more potential members and ultimately winning more votes. 36

Figure 4.1:

Political parties and presidential candidates created pages on Facebook and Twitter in which information about their campaign schedule and events was relayed to their followers. They also utilized YouTube to broadcast video messages to the world in general and Kenyans in particular. Using Social networking outreach tools such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, a number of Kenyan political candidates, especially the presidential aspirants, identified supporters and built unprecedented virtual electoral coalitions. They capitalized on this new but powerful medium to explain their manifestos to the voting public, reach Diaspora, raise funds, sell their policies and inform people of their activities, question other candidates’ policies and address the concerns of their supporters through this interactive medium. 37

Studies have shown that Twitter users tend to be more inclined towards politics. Further, the social networking site has proved to be more leaning towards political discourse than Facebook. Almost all of the presidential aspirants utilized the site’s features - tweets, promoted hashtags and promoted accounts - to connect with their followers and even those who do not follow them on Twitter.

However, while seven of the eight leading candidates and their vices were using Twitter during the campaign, a few were able to grasp the power of the platform to reach their audiences. Peter Kenneth and Martha Karua led the pack in their activity. At one time, Karua appeared as the most mentioned candidate by commentators on Twitter: @JamesOleKiyiapi (James Ole Kiyiapi), @Marthakarua (Martha Karua), @MusaliaMudavadi (Musalia Mudavadi), @PaulMuite (Paul Muite), @Peter_Kenneth (Peter Kenneth), @RailaOdinga (Raila Odinga), and @UKenyatta (Uhuru Kenyatta). 38

The story was no different on Facebook where the presence of the presidential candidates was conspicuously unparalleled.

36 Battle for votes moves to social media http://www.nation.co.ke/News/politics/Battle-for-votes-moves-to-social-media/-/1064/1538708/-/970bzx/-/index.html


38 List of Kenya’s Presidential aspirants on Social Media http://africommons.com/2012/10/24/list-of-kenyas-presidential-aspirants-on-social-media/
In terms of personalities, Uhuru Kenyatta, Martha Karua, Mwalimu Kingangi, Maina Kageni, Raila Odinga and William Ruto led the pack. Politicians tend to have split numbers because they have multiple pages unlike corporate brands which have one main point of reference page.

For example, Raila Odinga had two Facebook fanpages one with 78,000 fans and the other with 74,000 although membership could overlap. William Ruto who had two pages one with 58,000 fans the other 52,972. Kalonzo Musyoka had 19,156 fans. Peter Kenneth had 47,000 fans.39 (The total number of Facebook fans of the various political candidates was not static).

Uhuru had his fan page but also had Team Uhuru fan page. Uhuru Kenyatta’s Facebook page had received close to half a million likes, making it the individual profile with the most likes in Kenya, while that of Ruto had close to 250,000 likes. On Twitter, Kenyatta’s handle had close to 125,000 followers, while Ruto’s has 25,000 followers. Only David Maillu had no Facebook or Twitter account.

The presidential aspirants acquired multiple Twitter and Facebook accounts, blogs and websites for themselves, their parties and different lobby groups associated with them. They intensified their campaigns by posting frequent updates on their activities and that of their parties on their various social media platforms.

One social media marketer in Nairobi, Mathew Muthuri, observed, “Politicians know that if they want to reach the youthful voters, social media is the place to be. Each presidential candidate has a sizeable number of friends on Facebook and followers on Twitter,”

Launching his online campaign forum, Raila Odinga, a leading presidential candidate, noted, “I will make you privy to my thinking on urgent issues that affect us all. You will tweet, then I will tweet.”

Another presidential candidate, Martha Karua, posted on her Facebook wall, “We live in a rough neighborhood where we have remained a positive force of peace and stability. Our territorial

integrity is violated and our border communities are left at the mercy of bandits. This must stop.\footnote{Kenyan Politicians Struggle To Incorporate Social Media In Election Campaigns http://www.webmania.co/blog/kenyan-politicians-struggle-incorporate-social-media-election-campaigns}

In the 2007 campaign and aftermath, social media platforms like blogs were a significant source of information and advocacy, but not generally officially associated with campaigns. Five years later, as the number of social media users increased and the influence of social media spread, politicians could not afford to ignore this voting constituency. Social media has taken on a new role – a bigger one – in political campaigns, engagement and interaction, mobilization and organization of potential voters, fundraising, reaching the Diaspora, selling of campaign promises and policies and informing the public of relevant political activities.

Top on the list of presidential candidates in Kenya who actively used social media to engage voters is Prime Minister RailaOdinga and legislator Martha Karua. The two were among people in the country with the biggest followers on Twitter and friends on Facebook. Almost every hour, they informed voters of what they were doing, in both words and pictures, and commented on issues that affect Kenyans.

Odinga wrote on his Twitter handle, inviting supporters to his last rally "I will be at Kamukunji grounds in Kibera at 2 p.m. today for a public rally. You are all welcome."

Similarly, Karua reached out to voters using her Twitter and Facebook accounts as much as she campaigned in various parts of the East African nation. She wrote on her Facebook page: "This Sunday, I would like to appreciate millions of Kenyans who wake up every day and go about their business hoping to make ends meet. You are the game-changers and you all humble me. To you, I say better days are coming."

Martha Karua also used social media to raise funds for her campaigns. Karua launched an initiative dubbed Simamana mama namia (donate 1.2 dollars for my campaign) on social media. The initiative appealed to voters to help her raise funds, which would make her accountable to voters when she was elected president.

"Thank you all for your overwhelming support to Simamana mama namia fundraising initiative. You have taken a step of faith and heeded my call to action for you to own your presidency," she appreciated as she gave out a mobile phone money account where voters can send their donations.

Social media served as a convenient platform where Kenyans could reach and question their leaders since public debates are not popular in Kenya and most presidential candidates shy away from such events. For instance, George Otieno, a Kenyan citizen asked Martha Karua on Facebook:

"For how long will Kenyans continue living in insecurity and poor health? Many Kenyans are economic refugees in the U.S., Britain and other

\footnote{Kenyan Politicians Struggle To Incorporate Social Media In Election Campaigns http://www.webmania.co/blog/kenyan-politicians-struggle-incorporate-social-media-election-campaigns}
countries because they could not get jobs here. Every five years, Kenyans go to the polls to elect leaders who promise them heaven, yet they never live up to their promises, what will be different this time?" George became appreciative of the power of social media in linking leaders and voters when Karua answered her on Facebook. "I would never have found an opportunity to ask her the question but social media has given me the power to do that," he said.

Every Friday and Thursday respectively, Odinga and Karua held 'press conferences' on Twitter where they received questions live from Kenyans.

The leading contenders for the 2013 Kenya elections cunningly joined social media en masse since a bulk of the voting population could now be reached via this medium. They were quick in realizing that the personal interaction this revolutionary media afforded is priceless and unprecedented. It is therefore little wonder that they also strategically placed individuals who do the propaganda work for them on Twitter and Facebook to influence public opinion. This is nothing short of shrewdness since it was believed that some 70 percent of the elections would be driven by social media propaganda. Blogger and media guru Bogonko Bosire admitted that assertion. He argued, "Election campaign time is like wartime…. Candidates who control discussions on the networks will control the elections."

Moreover, Kenyan politicians organized high profile meet-ups with local popular bloggers and social media opinion-makers just to connect and build beneficial personal relationships online. It started with a dinner with PM Raila Odinga, then came the meeting with Vice President Kalonzo Musyoka and finally a meeting with former

Information and Communication Minister Raphael Tuju who declared his presidential candidacy through YouTube in Sheng (a mash up language of English & Swahili popular among young Kenyans)41

This was a step in the right direction as many Kenyans, especially the youth, depended heavily on social media for up-to-the-minute news updates and relevant information.

However, not all were enthused or interested in the political ambitions or policies of the candidates. The candidates, therefore, had to contend with a barrage of insults and ethnic-laced criticisms and accusations from people irked by their burning quest for power. There were instances where unpleasant remarks were made after a presidential candidate had posted his supposed plan for the country on Facebook, one of the popular social media sites in Kenya. Some even referred to this unfortunate development as “online ethnic cleansing.”

Musa Ibrahim, an IT consultant in Nairobi, asserted that politicians invested tremendously in social media not only to market themselves but importantly to gauge the fickle public opinion about them.

“In a tribal society like ours, a politician will simply judge his or her support base by the names of the people who comment on their posts or websites. This enables their teams to strategise. It’s just like a scientific opinion poll,” He told IQ4News

He admits that those who use social media can shape public opinion, and can easily influence

those without access to the Internet. Despite the numerous benefits associated with social media, Ibrahim particularly blamed it for the rise in the ethnic loathing and hostilities, as the election date close got closer:

“The mushrooming of bloggers working in cahoots with politicians is not good for the country because they thrive in spreading hate and lies,” he added.

4.5 Kenyans shape the electoral and political processes through social media

Like many parts in the world, a large chunk of Kenyan social media users comprises the able-bodied youths aged between 18 and 35 years who could easily be incited to take up arms by the slightest provocation. Amongst the chief causes cited for the 2007-08 post-election violence includes the high youth demographic and the high rate of unemployment among urban youth in Kenya.

Although these problems still exist, things have changed and the youth has imbibed some vital lessons from the grim consequences that the previous electoral violence left in its wake with the help of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) by means of civic education. The loss of precious lives, properties and in some cases families and friends caused by the violence have sensitized the youth to cherish and safeguard the peace and unity they now enjoy.

Many a Kenyan youth wouldn’t like to see any repeat of what happened then in 2007-08 after any elections. Instead of doing nothing and letting their frustration build up, they are actively using social media, blogging and expressing their opinions about a wide range of issues including the current state of the economy, the depreciating currency, unemployment and much more.

Young Kenyans are now setting the national agenda and influencing debate in a way never seen before. One good example of this was when the current budget was being prepared by the Kenyan Minister of Finance, Uhuru Kenyatta. In order to meet the requisite civic participation requested by law, Kenyatta asked Kenyans to share their ideas and suggestions on the budgetary interventions they would like to see in the 2011/2012 Financial Year Budget through his social media accounts, including Twitter and Facebook. On his twitter account (@UKenyatta), the minister tweeted: “Morning guys - I’d really like to have your input on the 2011-2012 budget. What are your priorities? Suggestions? Ideas?”

On his Facebook fan page, the minister requested Kenyans to send in their ideas and suggestions on the Budget through a Google Document Form that was embedded on the page. The Treasury received an unprecedented 3000+ submission through Twitter, Facebook, emails and the blogosphere.42

It is heartening to see how the youth is interested in the political direction of their country and heartwarming to note how they are using social media positively to shape the future of their beloved motherland.

Another inspiring example of young Kenyans setting the agenda on social media happened when aKenyant youth, Ahmed Salim — also known as @ahmedsalims on Twitter — in collaboration with theKenyan RedCross, started a campaign on

Facebook and Twitter that urged Kenyans to skip at least one meal and donate the cost to help feed starving Kenyans in the northern part of Kenya where many Kenyans were affected by the drought some time back. Donations were made through SMS on the mobile money payment system, Mpesa.

The campaign dubbed #KenyaforKenyans went viral on social media within just a few hours. One week later, Kenyan corporate players, among them the mobile phone network operator Safaricom, the Kenya commercial Bank and Media Houses, joined in. At least, KES. 671,784, 062.00 (4,901,978.00 EUR) were raised. The youth did not only manage to raise awareness and combat a humanitarian crisis, but they bypassed the current political system and effectively solved a critical problem together.43

The inspiring practice of Kenyans making use of social media to bring about socio-economic and political change was also replicated in their 2013 elections. The success of the 2013 Kenyan elections can be partly attributed to the current crop of peace-loving Kenyans and especially the youth who are bent on securing a better future for their country as future leaders of the land.

During the 2013 elections, the electorate used the social media platforms to hold political debates, access their presidential candidates, asked pertinent questions and inform them about their aspirations and fears.

Through social media, Kenyans keenly monitored the electoral process and actively participated in political discussions online. Throughout the elections, Facebook pages of Kenyan citizens were flooded with political messages and comments. On Twitter, every single issue related to the elections was touched. Many hashtags were created on Twitter for all the significant aspects of the elections. #Kenyadebate, #kedebate13 and #Kenyadebate13 were just three of the hash tags specifically for the Kenyan presidential debate where people eagerly tweeted their views about the debate in general and the performance of the presidential aspirants in particular. The first presidential debate was so heavily discussed on Twitter that it briefly became one of the world’s top trending topics. 44

According to some statistics, over 100,000 tweets were posted as the three-and-a-half hour debate reached an audience of 189 million on the microblogging site, Twitter. The debate was also rife on Facebook, where it remained the main topic at that moment.

The second presidential debate also saw people across the country take to Twitter en masse to analyze the discussion. As happened with the first debate, the Kenyan elections quickly started trending globally on Twitter, with ‘Kenya’ and moderator ‘Joe Ageyo’ both hitting the top ten. Within Kenya, the conversation focused around a number of trending terms, including #kedebate13, #choice2013 and #uhuru.

Other popular Twitter hash tags with number of mentions via tweets on Twitter included #Kenyadecides (55,576), #Kenya (14,941) #kepolls2013 (2,617), #keelections2013 (2,270), #kenyaelection (539), #kenyavotes (386)# just to mention a few.


mention a few. Besides tens of thousands of tweets with no hashtags, these six key Twitter hashtags – led by #kenyadecides – were used at least 76,000 times during the Election Day. Other hash tags also used are #decision13, #keDecides, #keElections2013, #Kenya, and #KOT.

Over the previous 30 days before the March elections, these tags were used in nearly 200,000 tweets, with #kenya appearing nearly 65,000 times. The collective and swelling volume of activity on Twitter suggests a record level of social media interaction for an African election. The level of engagement was much higher than in 2007. For a while, the Kenya election was trending worldwide on Twitter.

Based on the above figures, social media was more utilized in the 2013 Kenyan general elections than during Nigeria’s 2011 presidential elections. An estimated 70,000 people posted contents online during Nigeria’s 2011 polls. Kenyans already seem to have posted more content despite having one-quarter the population of Nigeria.

Kenyans also engaged social media to shape their own national narratives during the elections. For instance, when the USA based popular Cable News Network (CNN) ran a story that claimed that ahead of the elections, Kenyans were preparing for war, Kenyans on Twitter reacted in no uncertain terms on social media to the allegedly “staged” story with the hash tag #SomeoneTellCNN.

The anger centered on reports by CNN reporter Nima Elbagir who had claimed in her report that an unnamed militia group were arming themselves in the Rift Valley with “guns made from iron piping and bullets bought from the black market”. The government claimed the story was stage-managed after Elbagir refused to disclose her sources to government spokesman Muthui Kariuki.

The story, entitled “Kenyans armed and ready to vote” which was uploaded on the CNN website and aired on the CNN as a curtain-raiser to Kenya’s elections, depicted four people whose faces were obscured carrying, what the reporter Nima Elbagir, described as “guns fashioned from iron piping, home-made swords and bullets bought from the black-market”.

What partly generated the wellspring of anger from the online community is the fact that the

45 #kenyadecides hashtag mentioned 55,000+ times on election day (March 5, 2013)
http://www.oafrica.com/statistics/kenyadecides-hashtag-mentioned-55000-times-on-election-day/

46 Kenyans on Twitter react angrily to election violence claims

47 Shiundu, Alphonce (March 1, 2013). “Online fury over CNN’s story on unnamed militia group”
story failed to mention a rally at Nairobi’s Uhuru Park about peaceful elections, which happened on the same day the story was run. They were also embittered by the reporter’s neglect or exclusion of the fervent preparations by the police to ensure acts of crime and violence do not happen during the elections. Vows by the presidential candidates that they would concede defeat and take their grievances to the courts in a meeting earlier on in the same week were also not mentioned in her story.

One by one, Kenyans flooded Twitter to debunk and condemn the story and nearly called the integrity of CNN into account:

“A story needs to be balanced, where is the side of the coin showing people who are going around preaching peace?” posed Michelle Anekeya in her tweet to the reporter, Nima Elbagir, whose handle is @NimaCNN.

Mohammed Hersi @hersimohammedtweeted:

Mohammed later added on Twitter:

Also Grant Brooke posed: “Where was CNN when all the candidates stood together and told their followers to commit no acts of violence?”

In a follow-up tweet Grant added: “Parachute-in journalists in search of disaster completely miss the great story of peace and reform b4 their eyes”.

Gideon Serem too had queries for the global, American-based broadcaster: “Don't your journalists have anything positive to report about the Kenyan election”.

“Isn't there just something else to anticipate apart from your WAR & ARMS, it just sounds twisted,“ noted a person whose twitter handle is @AverageKenyan.

Fatma Albeity With the twitter handle @f_albeity also tweeted:

This did not only force CNN to stop airing the story and remove it from their website but compelled them to issue an appeasing response to Kenyans on Twitter:

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Likewise, Kenyans did not take kindly to the tweets from France 24 presenter Stuart Norval. Norval provoked a backlash after tweeting reports of gunshots in Nairobi as people fought to vote. Using the Twitter Handle Stuart Norval @stuartf24, he 

Using the hash tag #TweetLikeAForeignJournalist, ordinary but tech-savvy Kenyans did not hold back from mocking some perceived unprofessional foreign journalists who made exaggerated reports on elections-related skirmishes with sarcastic comments, witticism and pun.

This was not the first time Kenyans had fought for their interest on social media. Kenyans on twitter have on many occasions taken it upon themselves to fight for their country on social media. When a certain blog listed Nairobi as the second worst city to live in, Kenyans on twitter were fast to react and satirize it. Furthermore, when Kenyan MPs wanted to increase their salaries, Kenyans on Twitter—with the hash tag #KOT- mobilized themselves for a peaceful demonstration.

The call for tolerance and peace was also reassuring on social media. Twitter and Facebook were particularly useful in preaching peace and patience throughout the tense electoral period. Kenyans inundated the pages of social media sites with peaceful messages and overshadowed the few provocative comments with a flurry of calls for unity while appealing to fellow Kenyans on social media to exercise restraint.
Throughout the elections, Kenyans took to Twitter in droves to disapprove fears of a repeat of deadly violence witnessed in the last disputed 2007 elections. As the electoral results started arriving, Kenyans used Twitter hashtags #kenyadecides and #postelectionpeace to urge against violence, no matter the result. However, as tallying of presidential results encountered technical challenges in relaying of provisional count, Tweeps created yet another harsh tag: #Tunaweswait. This was used to plead for patience as IEBC manually tallied the official results from constituency returning officers.

As mentioned earlier, the youth are the largest customers or users of social media in Kenya just like other parts of the world. Due to their boundless energies and sheer strength, the youth are the same ones who are easily manipulated and often incited to engage in needless violence. It was therefore comforting to see the youth in Kenya making a productive use of social media towards influencing their electoral and political process and thereby shaping their national narrative and agenda.

4.6 Social Media and the Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission (IEBC)

The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), Kenya’s electoral commission, created an informative Facebook page for the elections. The page proved very helpful to Kenyan’s burgeoning internet users and particularly the social media-craze youth. The commission made sure that all up-to-date information relevant to the elections was made available on their Facebook page so that voters will be well informed about the electoral process. People with unsettling questions could also seek clarification from the commission through their Facebook page.

4.6.1 Social Media and CSOs
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4.6.1 Social Media and CSOs

The Kenya Elections Observation Group's (ELOG), a coalition of ten civil society organizations came up with relevant election-related content not only on their website, but also on their Facebook page and Twitter account. They served as good resources for citizens and other election-monitoring bodies to follow for a trustworthy report on the elections.

4.6.2 The Threat of Social Media to the Kenya Elections

Radio is traditionally noted for playing the leading channel for the dissemination of hate speech in Kenya. This dilemma was amply evidenced by the inclusion of a local radio presenter among the ICC indictees in the aftermath of the 2007/2008 post-election violence. Joshua Arap Sang faces charges of crimes against humanity alongside Kenyatta and Ruto. All of them claim they are innocent.

During the 2007-08 clashes, mobile phone text messages aided in mobilizing vigilante groups and mobs, according to the National Human Rights Commission. To curb this and prevent another possible mayhem, Kenya issued an order to de-register all lines that cannot be traced to a known user in an attempt to clamp down on people sending out provocative texts.

However, such noble and well-intentioned efforts by Kenyan authorities to halt the use of mobile phones to incite violence could be painfully thwarted by the arrival of affordable smart phones on the Kenyan Market which has increased internet use on cell phones and generated an explosion of social media. Even if they succeeded in preventing unknown mobile phone users from sending out provocative text messages, stopping those people from using social media to advance their diabolic intention would be more of a herculean task.

Consequently, some feared Facebook and Twitter would take the place of the SMS text this time around.

4.6 Sanitizing the social media landscape in the Kenya elections

The increasing threat of blogs and bloggers, Facebook and Twitter can only be left out of the dangers social media pose to the detriment of those monitoring hate and dangerous speech on social media, and can be ignored only at the peril of the whole country. Hate speech in the last elections was spread by phone text, radio, and leaflets.
Though the government had rolled out measures to tackle this menace by even going to the extent of de-registering mobile phones whose lines cannot be traced to a known user, authorities feared unidentified war mongers and inciters might hide behind shielding weblogs (blogs), Facebook and Twitter to post and circulate their bitterness and discontent. This could unfortunately serve as basis for protests and riots and ultimately set the stage for unnecessary mayhem.

Consequently, a number of election-monitoring bodies were introduced in the elections to assist in ensuring violent free elections. Among them were social media monitoring bodies such as Umati and Uchaguzi whose main work was to monitor the social media platform for provocative and inflammatory postings, identify the perpetrators and assist the Kenyan authorities in tracking them down for prosecution.

4.6.1 Umati

Fears that social media could drive a repeat of 2007 violence were completely far from baseless. The arduous task of Kagonya Awori and her tech-savvy team attested to this fact. Awori heads Umati, a web-based project monitoring dangerous speech for research firm iHub Research, which conducts Africa-focused tech research out of Nairobi.

To curb the spread of hate speech, Kenyan authorities passed legislation banning media outlets from re-printing hate speech. In spite of the fact that the media houses were prohibited from re-printing tribal hate speech in full, the authorities had not been able to stop ordinary Kenyans from voicing tribal animosities on social media. Examples of online vitriol included calls to "chinjachinja", or "butcher butcher" in Swahili, as well as to beat, loot, riot, kill, and drive out other tribes.

Such inciting postings would not augur well for the peace and security the country desired to achieve before, during and after the elections. That was why Awori and her Umati team were constantly on the watch to pick out and condemn such incendiary statements before they plunged the country into another gory massacre.

Each and every day, Kagonya Awori and her dedicated team, scanned through Facebook and Twitter for warning indications that Kenya's elections in March might unleash the same ethnic violence that nearly plunged the country into civil war five years ago. The group of six embarked on a search for hate speech and inflammatory

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postings by carefully sifting through blogs and social media sites. They looked out for early signs and clues of escalating inter-tribal tension. The threat of social media was definitely real and Awori and her colleagues had a justified reason to be worried.

Umati lead Researcher Kagonya Awori says: “Anything put in public space is for public consumption and online is a public platform,” she says. At one time, there were about 30 sites being monitored including those using local dialects. “We are looking at blogs that are up to date and feature Kenyan issues locally and in the Diaspora. Besides Facebook and Twitter we are looking at online newspapers, and recently introduced the monitoring of You Tube videos posted by media houses,” she said. Besides Kiswahili, English and Sheng, social sites using Kikuyu, Luo, Luhyia and Kalenjin were also monitored.

If there is anything Kenyans feared most, it would be the unfortunate repetition of the 2007 post-election violence when the declaration of incumbent President MwaiKibaki as the re-elected victor was disputed by opponents and erupted into bloodbath. More than 1,200 people were slaughtered; many butchered by machete, burnt alive or shot with bows and arrows as the country's biggest tribes turned on one another.

"The amount of dangerous speech is going up but, this time, the people who are saying these things are not hiding at all," said Awori. Umati scanned twitter, blogs, and Facebook for incidents of hate speech in seven different Kenyan languages. These seven Kenyan languages or tribes were arrived at based purely on population size figures that put them at the top.

Five specialists, representing Kenya’s five major ethnic groups, focused on social media and the Web for a country of about 44 million. They have set definitions to identify the point at which free speech becomes criminal incitement. Monitors used an online categorization process that enabled them sort the collected statements in order of severity. These were rated as offensive speech, moderately dangerous speech, and extremely dangerous speech. Of the three, moderately dangerous speech continued to be the most rampant. Examples of such messages posted online include: ‘Show me a (tribe) and I will show you a waste of space on this beautiful planet.’ ‘We won’t vote for a woman, shindwanaushindwe’.

iHub Research Project Manager Angela Crandall also confirmed that negative sentiments targeting tribe top the list of dangerous messages that were being spewed online, with others targeted at gender, religion, and political inclinations. The most frequent call to action on monitored Kenyan blogs, newspapers, Facebook pages and tweets according to a study by Umati, was to discriminate members of another group. The report noted that the highest use of dangerous speech from Kenyans online is by identifiable commenters, with 53 per cent in October and 90 per cent in November 2012.

"There are outright calls to kill, forcefully evict and steal as well as discriminate against members of particular communities," Kagonya Awori said. Awori’s group found most of the hate speech on Facebook, where users frequently revealed their names, and often their location.

When they come across such dangerous messages on social media - that which has the potential to cause violence, - they forward them to Uchaguzi, the incident-mapping platform for the election.
There citizens can track, promote examination of, and even debunk the speech. Uchaguizi relied on tens of thousands of Kenyan citizen journalists who monitored the elections and mapped incidents of violence through many channels particularly social media.49

Umati shared the reports it developed with different partners including the police, National Cohesion and Integration Commission and the civil society. They were also in contact with the ministry of Communication as well as electoral commission.

### 4.6.2 Uchaguzi

_Uchaguzi_ was a crowdsourcing website that also enabled citizens with access to SMS, Twitter, email, or Facebook to report incidents of illegal activities, hate speech and poll violence. The Uchaguzi team then verified the reports before responding to them by “getting verified information to organizations and individuals who can intervene positively and monitoring that response to measure its effectiveness”. Among other things, it connected on-the-ground reports with law enforcement officials.

Daudi Were is the coordinator of _Uchaguzi_, which means “election” in Swahili. He explains: “Uchaguzi is a project whose core aim is to help Kenya have a free, fair, credible general election. Our strategy for achieving that aim is increasing transparency and accountability by increasing citizen participation in the electoral process.”50

The Uchaguzi website is built on the _Ushahidi crowdsourcing platform_, which emerged during the post-election crisis in January 2008. Nearly 45,000 Kenyans contributed to Ushahidi over twitter, SMS, email and the web, to map incidents of violence around the country.51

Umati was an arm of the Uchaguzi project which was deployed by Ushahidi. Both Umati and Ucaguzi are part of the _Ushahidi_ network which is Swahili for "testimony" or “witness”. Created in 2008 as a way for Kenyans to report instances of post-election violence, it has since been used to map acts of war in Gaza, earthquake devastation in Haiti and U.S. activist have also used it to chart human rights abuses in Syria.

During Kenya's 2010 constitutional referendum, Ushahidi also proved it could play a key role in curbing aggression. When it received an SMS message of rumours that machete-wielding men had rushed to a polling station in western Kenya, it verified the threat with its sources on the ground and alerted the police. Fifteen minutes later, dozens of police officers swooped on the polling station to halt any possible trouble. "It looked like magic for the guy who sent the SMS," recalled Daudi Were, Ushahidi's project manager.

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Ushahidi and their affiliate projects – Umati and Uchaguzi – proved very instrumental in averting both potential and actual violence in the 2013 Kenyan elections.

4.6.3 The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) and the Police

The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), a national agency set up to reconcile tribes after the 2007 election violence said it was working with police to identify threats and hate speech to avoid a repeat of the 2007 mayhem. Particular attention was being paid to political rallies and social media, Alice Nderitu, an official at National Cohesion and Integration Commission, told Reuters.

The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) established a department headed by a cybercrime expert to scan social media for rabble-rousing language. Many offenders were identified on Facebook, Twitter, and on blogs. Some of the offenders were even referred to the director of public prosecution who might face jail time.²²

Besides relying on information from initiatives like Umati, NCIC also worked in partnership with the Communications Commission of Kenya, Content Service providers and mobile phone operators to fight hate speech.

The police also noted with extreme caution the specter of violence social media can raise. "We are monitoring and will take people to court for using abusive language on social media," said Nicholas Kamwende, head of the police's criminal investigations department in Nairobi.

4.7 Proactive Measures

Some have referred to the work of the Umati initiative and the work of Awori and her team as reactionary in nature. Setting up keywords to monitor, tracking conversations, identifying frequent sources of hate speech, curating content or the evidence, and moving on to arrest these perpetrators can be a tiresome and slow process.

In addition to the work of Awori’s Umati team, the government also put in place laudable proactive measures in the form of instituting media guidelines, moral suasion and strict warning.

The Kenyan government laid out strict guidelines to tamp down hate speech as the country prepared to hold the general elections. The new regulations, called "Guidelines for the Prevention of Transmission of Undesirable Political Messages via Electronic Communication Networks", were announced in Nairobi on Wednesday (October 24, 2012).²³

The guidelines were made to monitor messages sent via mobile phone as well as content disseminated on social media networks to ensure no offensive or inciting messages were posted on Twitter and Facebook, said Permanent Secretary

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in the Ministry of Information and Communications Bitange Ndema.

The guidelines required politicians to submit campaign text messages and political advertisements for vetting at least two days before they were sent, aired or broadcasted to the public. According to the guidelines, Text messages could only be sent between 8 am and 6 pm, strictly in English or Swahili languages and not in any other languages used by ethnic communities.

"The guidelines also called for all sponsors of political messages not only to identify themselves but also sign documents to authorise them to send the messages and affirm their commitment to abide by the rules," Communication Commision of Kenya (CCK) Director Francis said.

"Those who defy these regulations will go to jail," Ndema told Sabahi. He said anyone who sent threatening, insulting, abusive or inciting messages capable of stirring ethnic hatred using their mobile phones and those who violate the political advertising rules could face penalty of 1 million shillings ($11,700), a jail term of up to three years, or both. 54

Ndema said the guidelines aimed to prevent the violence that engulfed the country after the disputed 2007 presidential election in which top politicians were accused of inciting violence which resulted in the death of more than 1000 and over 300,000 Kenyans displaced.

"According to intelligence reports, the political violence that engulfed various parts of the country in 2007 and early 2008 was largely a result of the use of irresponsible and inflammatory language in the run up to and immediate aftermath of the elections," Ndema said. "To leverage on the mobile platform and further entrench our democratic culture and avoid another bloodbath, it has become increasingly urgent to put in place this regulatory safeguard to guard against transmission of hate messages."

Mary Ombara, member of the National Steering Committee on Media Monitoring, said the guidelines demanded that all media houses engage only professionally trained journalists in hosting political debates or writing commentaries on political events in the country.

She intimated that professional journalists have a high level of discretion and responsibility and this will limit reports on inflammatory statements from the politicians. "We will be monitoring for compliance," she said. "We do not want to be caught flatfooted." 55

The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK), the police and the entire mobile telecommunications industry, which developed the guidelines, all helped to enforce the regulations.

Besides the guidelines, Kenyan authorities also issued strict warning to journalists and media houses concerning their conduct and choice of words in the elections. They cautioned both traditional and online journalists to be circumspect in choosing their words to avoid


inflaming tensions. “We will set you on fire before you set us on fire,” government spokesman Muthui Kariuki warned international journalists at a breakfast meeting.

"We believe to a greater extent that (the violence of) 2007-08 was a result of a lot of information that journalists wrote and passed on to our people," he said.

This timely warning came in the light of offensive and provocative words some online users continued to spew in the Kenyan blogosphere. They were said to attack opposing tribe members, calling them “snakes”, “maggots” and “vultures”, among other names on the internet. Clearly, the cataclysmic implications of such hostile name-calling are not far-fetched.

"These [hate speech posts] are actually telling people to re-enact what happened in 2007, so it's very vicious," said Mary Ombara, secretary of Kenya's media monitoring body who received daily reports on online hate speech.

**4.8 Why monitor social media?**

Those who are no strangers to the experience of Kenyans during the last 2007 election, and the violence-fraught struggles of Africans continent-wide to secure more lasting and stable democracies, are forced to admit that the flames of electoral violence are best quenched not after it has been stoked and flared but way before it is ignited by inciters with their provocative speech and conduct.

The political violence that engulfed various parts of the country in 2007 and early 2008 was largely a result of the use of irresponsible and inflammatory language in the run up to and immediate aftermath of the elections. Social media could dangerously serve as a platform for the propagation of intemperate and inflammatory language which could incite another wave of violence. Thus, it became very necessary to check and monitor the use of such a new but powerful media.

The government was alarmed by scattered reports of violence and the use of social media to attack certain groups of people. For instance, the Somalia-based El Shabaab terrorist group set off bombs in the capital of Nairobi, inspiring hate speech in social media against Kenya’s Muslim citizens. Ferdinand Waititu, parliamentarian and The National Alliance (TNA) party candidate for Nairobi governor, was filmed fulminating against the Masai community. Already, violence had claimed the lives of dozens of people in the Southeast Tana River district, with Orma herders and Pokomo farmers attacking one another.

This unfortunate atmosphere of animosity inspired and prompted the Kenyan government to implement an observation regime against certain types of hate speech, warn its perpetrators they will be watched and cited, and even hired about 100 monitors to watch social media sites like Facebook and Twitter for such alleged incitements to violence.

The government had the right to block or close down a site that communicates hate speech, such as a Facebook page. Under the 2009 Communications Amendment Act, a piece of legislation about which many Kenyans have some severe reservations, the government can even identify or track an inciter to arrest.

According to Information Permanent Secretary Dr. Bitange Ndemo, the Government identified some blogs, Facebook pages and websites propagating division among the various ethnic communities and hate messages on social media and mainstream media. Websites that were
identified by the government for allegedly propagating division and the posting of hate speech by its users included Mashada.com, Kenyanlist.com, The Kenyan Daily Post, and the Facebook pages 1,000,000 Likes To Stop Raila and Kalonzo From Winning 2013 Election and STOP Uhuru Kenyatta NOW.\(^56\)

The administrators and bloggers responsible would be arraigned in court as evidence against the culprits was handed over to the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, the Kenya Police and the Communications Commission of Kenya.

Though a lot of people are suspicious of the whole process of monitoring speech and taking legal measures against it since in their view it is tantamount to censorship and tyranny, the need to maintain free, fair and transparent elections is indisputably paramount. Umati, the national cohesion and integration commission, the ministry of information and the other stakeholders, had a great task in making sure that the freedom of speech as a constitutional right of all persons was not abused at the expense of the national peace and unity in the discharge of their duties.

In order to make sure that the freedom of speech was not squelched, monitoring agencies worked hard to differentiate “dangerous speech” from “hate speech” and other types of speech. For instance, Umati was crafting a five-part process of defining “dangerous speech, and of differentiating it from hate speech, based on Prof. Susan Benesch’s work. Dangerous speech is defined as a subset of hate speech which has the potential to catalyze violence. Hate speech can be vile and ugly, but may not be ‘dangerous speech.’”

Umati and the relevant government institutions were doing everything possible to protect the freedom of speech because it is their project aims to limit dangerous speech while avoiding excessive restrictions by not trampling on one of the key fundamental human rights of the people as enshrined in the constitution.

4.9 The Lack of Political Will

The power of technology especially social media in tracking down inciters of violence is just phenomenal. Social media facilitated the identification of MP Ferdinand Waititu as an alleged inciter of ethnic violence through a popular video clip taken by a rally witness on his mobile phone. He was captured in raging against the Masai community. Yet, he still remained in office and nothing was done to him.

Obviously, it is one thing tracking down inciters and another bringing them to justice. It seems the government lacks the political will to prosecute perpetrators especially if they belong to the elite class. Thus, many wonder if it is even important to monitor hate speech when apparently the government lacks the political will to do anything tangible with the information collected.

But there is a brighter side to it. Though the government may have a very limited will to prosecute offenders, the general public can make well-informed decision based on the information gleaned from social media.

Ms. Angela Crandall, who is the research manager for iHub, particularly favors this point. She argues: “if we collect and aggregate this

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information, the people will have it. This is especially important to the growing middle class, educated Kenyans, who believe they should be able to hold their leaders accountable”.

Furthermore, there’s a civic education element to the whole monitoring exercise as well. Through monitoring, false alarms and information that are circulated online can be identified, its authenticity critically examined and its claims vehemently disproved, debunked and denounced. “Together, we can disprove myths that are being retweeted or otherwise pushed around online,” Crandall said.

A significant case in point is when some Kenyans posted blatant and shameful falsehood on Twitter after a Muslim cleric was killed in Mombasa. One of the memes that became very popular was the claim that Muslims had set one of Mombasa’s Christian churches on fire. Interestingly, the director of the Whitesands Hotel in Mombasa went out to church that was supposedly burning and photographed it. The church was fine. He posted the photo, saying, “Stop the lies!”

The Kenyan general elections were never under-reported, thanks to social media. From the beginning of the elections to the end, whatever happened – good or evil – was captured and scrutinized by a mobile-equipped, tool-rich and social media-craze society. It is no wonder that the success of the elections was trumpeted to the world by the country’s proud voters – using those same technological instruments and social media, which is fast becoming part and parcel of the economic, social and political fabric of the country.

5.0 INTERACTIVE MEDIA AND SOCIAL APPLICATIONS (Apps) IN THE KENYA ELECTIONS

The Kenyan national elections saw the explosion of not only new media but also social media and mobile phone applications that were generally intended to provide timely information on the electoral process and other relevant civic information about the general elections as well as activities of the presidential and other political aspirants such as the presidential debate, campaign tours, and political rallies.

These interventions were necessary to open up the election process with vital information to prevent a replay of the disputed 2007 elections which resulted in widespread ethnic violence. It created important democratic platforms where voters could keep up with election proceedings and meaningfully participate in the political process through dialogue and thus be a part of the whole electoral process.

The social apps ranged from multiple elections-related apps like social media, games, and SMS-based apps which encouraged a peaceful election process, to crowd-sourced incident reporting sites which enabled citizens to participate in the monitoring process by reporting cases of potential or actual violence. Among the many apps launched during the elections included The Google Elections Hub, Kenya Election Youtube Channel, Election Kenya Portal, Track All and The Election Thief App Game, just to mention a few.

Google also unveiled 7 Apps built by Kenyan students which focused on the General elections57.

57 Kachwanya (February 20, 2013). “Google unveils Election Based Mobile Applications Developed by
The apps were based on the 5 thematic areas of Civic Education; Party and Politicians; Lifestyle; Resource Monitoring; and the Electoral process. They were designed to reach as many Kenyans as possible, and were to help them monitor the elections closely, locate important resource centers such as polling stations, and report any emergent issues. All the apps were available on ilabafrica.ac.ke and Google Play. The apps include: Spotlight, Tukumbuke, Jijulishe, Wenyenchi, Raslimali, Opinion Yetu and Game Play.\(^{58}\)

One reason the projects and tools have increased so greatly is the penetration of wired minds in Kenya. There were 8 million mobile users in 2007; there are now more than 30 million. The number of Internet users in Kenya has also risen. According to the Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK), there are almost 14 million active internet users (July – September 2012). Majority of Kenyans are said to access the internet through their cellphones. Mobile data/Internet subscriptions rose by 82.7 percent in 2011/12 from 4.1 million subscriptions in 2010/11. Below is an overview of some of the main apps in the 2013 Kenyan General elections.

**Figure 5.1: The Kenya Elections Hub**

Social media has become the preferred source of breaking news for many a Kenyan. It is no wonder that Google tapped into this significant development with its Kenya Elections Hub as the country got ready for the general election. Google decided to launch the [Kenya Elections Hub](http://www.google.com) before the elections in order to add to the various sources of election-related information and to also provide reliable statistics about the leading candidates.\(^{59}\)

The Kenya Elections Hub was launched by [Google Kenya](http://www.google.com) to facilitate the dissemination of information related to the country’s elections. The Hub operated through an online portal where Kenyans accessed information regarding the elections, including news updates, information on candidates and campaigns, and prevalent trends across the country.\(^{60}\)

People were informed about the new electoral system that was significantly reformed with a number of changes in electoral boundaries, seats available, and procedural and regulatory reforms pursuant to the country’s new constitution, which was implemented in 2010.\(^{61}\)

"The hub will provide a powerful platform for national dialogue and debate of electoral reforms," said King’ori Choto, a Nairobi-based media specialist and public relations practitioner. Alfred Otieno, a media expert at Alpex Consulting Africa, said what Kenyans required was real-time information to reduce incidents of misinformation that often led to violence.

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\(^{58}\) Kachwanya (February 20, 2013). "Google unveils Election Based Mobile Applications Developed by University Students." (http://www.kachwanya.com/google-unveils-election-based-mobile-applications-developed-by-university-students/)


"Overall, I see it as a good initiative," said Patrick Mayoyo, the deputy news editor of the Daily Nation, Kenya’s highest-circulating newspaper.

While most analysts welcomed the platform as an independent alternative, some warn it had significant weaknesses. One of the weaknesses of the portal was that, it was essentially aggregating what had been published by the local media which led to information redundancy.

However, it offered an opportunity for Kenyans to interact directly with the candidates, offered trending on key issues and how they were addressed by candidates. It also offered daily, weekly and monthly search trends on candidates based on volume, mentions in articles and blog posts and YouTube video views.

The commentators were, however, cautious on the number of Kenyans who would benefit from the hub. "I wonder whether the people who really need this information, largely the rural folks, will get it because of lack of internet access there," said Mr. Otieno.

"We’re empowering voters so that they are not simply watching from afar, but participating in, engaging with and shaping the political process in a democratic way, through platforms like YouTube, Google Maps and Google+,” Ory Okolloh, Google’s policy and government relations manager for Sub-Saharan Africa commented.

The launch of the Hub was just one of a string of initiatives on the part of Google to assist the country in its election process – having already provided the IEDC with open source technology for the online voter system; and having also provided training to political parties, civil society and the media on the most effective use of online tools to support the elections.

Figure 5.2: Kenya Election 2013 Youtube Channel

The elections in Kenya were most closely watched according to Google. Since the last elections in 2007/08, explosion of social media saw Kenya’s elections brought to the world real time for the first time ever via YouTube. In conjunction with Ireland-based social news agency Storyful, YouTube has launched a dedicated Kenya Election 2013 channel.  

Kenyans and the world accessed live-streams on elections after Google and Storyful launched a dedicated channel on YouTube that curated election-related content across the video-streaming site.

According to Google, the channel was necessitated by the desire to stimulate debate and promote understanding of political issues and trends among the electorate.

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“Through the launch of the YouTube channel, voters were able to follow the latest news and trends on the political scene, and engage with each other. Information drives the decisions we make on a day-to-day basis, and we remain committed to and are keen on sharing as much of it as possible with the public,” said Ory Okolloh, Google Policy Manager for Sub-Saharan Africa.

Storyful captured the best online footage from Kenya as the country was immersed in the process of choosing its next leader. By maintaining a dedicated YouTube channel for the Kenya 2013 elections, news, views and grassroot reporting from the election trail was brought together by Storyful in one convenient online portal, with playlists capturing some of the most important democratic themes.

The YouTube channel also hosted the live-streams of Kenya’s first ever presidential debate series which aired on the 11th February at 7 pm on TV and radio channels. Voters monitored and participated in the conversation using the most popular hash tags in the Kenyan twitter sphere.

“The online space is an increasingly important tool for outreach, engagement and reflection during the political process. Platforms such as Youtube will become key to leaders vying for elective positions as well as voters looking for specific information,” said Storyful’s managing director Markham Nolan.64

Figure 5.3: Elections Kenya Portal

As Kenya approached its most hi-tech polls, another election portal was launched detailing news from different media houses. 65

Released by Eziki TV, the new Election Kenya portal highlighted news from the eight presidential candidates, namely Raila Odinga, Uhuru Kenyatta, Musalia Mudavadi, Peter Kenneth, Martha Karua, James Ole Kiyai, Paul Muite and Mohammed Dida.

The aim of the Election Kenya portal was to give balanced news on what was happening regarding the general elections. It also made it easier for users to navigate from one newspaper to the next on political issues.

The portal also highlighted the trending topics discussed on the new social media and the conventional media. Under the header, it highlighted the hash tags that grouped different new topics.

5.1 TRACK ALL
One of the social applications that were launched to aid the election process is “Track All”66. Track All is a phone-based monitoring application that enabled candidates and politicians to track items,

64 “Kenya: online community galvanised to cover elections” http://www.itnewsafrica.com/2013/02/kenya-online-community-galvenised-to-cover-elections/?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter


reports and general public remarks about them on Facebook and Twitter during the elections. African Laughter, a new media firm in Kenya launched it.

Besides politics, the application also tracks public comments regarding general issues like infrastructure and amenities. Track All analyses these comments and informs the monitors about all posts - positive or negative - relating to the subject monitored.

“There with this phone app, we’ve opened media monitoring directly to all who need it, made it effortless, and built software that analyses what’s being said for its impact” according to Jenny Luesby, who is the managing director of African Laughter Limited.

The firm’s Business Development Director, Alakie Asige said, “We believe these features of real-time updating and a phone-embedded system represent a first in reputation monitoring, pushing Track All ahead of anything else in the market and creating a tool that will enable campaigners to see instantly the feedback on any event or rally”.

Figure 5.4: The Election Thief Game App

Kenyan developers, University of Games (UoG), created election-themed game app Election Thief67 in a bid to prompt consideration of peace and leadership before, during and after the elections.

The Android-based game challenges users to track down and chase a bad guy who has stolen the votes during the presidential elections. Players take on the character of Omu, an ordinary citizen. The developers intend the game to be a fun way of highlighting poignant issues such as peaceful voting and the importance of fair leadership within all levels of Kenyan society, in the lead up to the elections.

“The challenge, the story, the game-play and the artwork intertwine and work together to give the player fun as well as subtly pushing them to think about more serious things such as the importance of peace, and the role of leadership in society,” Brian Kinyua, Lead Programmer at UoG, told HumanIPO. Explaining UoG’s wishes regarding the impact of Election Thief, Kinyua said the company hopes to contribute to a considered and informed choice in the elections by voters.

“We hope that people will be able to judge for themselves what good leadership is. We hope that they will no longer be hypnotized and manipulated into doing things that will not benefit them. We hope that they will make the right choices,” he said.

5.2 UCHAGUZI

Uchaguzi, a project of the citizen-reporting organization Ushahidi, was an ambitious and very interesting hate-speech monitoring effort and issued regular reports during the election. Unlike in many of the instances of the platform where there is no feedback loop or action after a report is submitted by a citizen, Uchaguzi installed a

67 Mulligan, Gabriella (February 28, 2013). Election Thief game app launches in...
through active citizen participation in the electoral process. Increasing transparency and accountability through citizen participation in the electoral cycles.

**Figure 5.5: A screenshot of Uchaguzi**

Uchaguzi was Ushahidi’s primary project for the Kenyan elections. The purpose of the project was “putting citizens back at the heart of the electoral process.” Uchaguzi, which means “elections” in Swahili, served as a platform that enabled citizens to monitor the electoral process by reporting issues such as intimidation, hate speech, and polling clerk bias.

Ushahidi staff members and volunteers verified the reports and sent them to electoral authorities or security personnel on the ground for action. During the elections, Ushahidi deployed over 200 volunteers locally to respond to reports, and worked with over 1,000 crisis mappers internationally for around-the-clock coverage.

Uchaguzi provided an alternative outlet to violence and helped deal with tensions experienced during elections. It was used to verify reports, debunk rumors — which spread like wildfire in 2008 and fanned the flames of violence — and helped maintain peace.

Uchaguzi was another crowdsourcing platform that enabled citizens with access to SMS, Twitter, email, or Facebook to report incidents of illegal activities, hate speech and poll violence. There was also a media monitoring team who scanned Twitter, Facebook, blogs, mainstream media and other sources for any other information that could become a report in the system.

The team then verified the reports before responding to them by “getting verified information to organizations and individuals who can intervene positively and monitoring that response to measure its effectiveness”. Among other things, it connected on-the-ground reports with law enforcement officials.

Eight separate teams uploaded data and verified reports so that Uchaguzi could present quick, accurate and diverse election-related information for reporters. Daily blogs and Twitter messages were also released which contextualized what the data on the Uchaguzi map was showing.

There are many other efforts that aggregated social media on #kenyadecides. One was Crowdvoice’s election-related aggregation.

### 5.3 AL JAZEERA

Al Jazeera English introduced a great interactive dashboard with candidate information, an


**5.4 THE IEBC’s INTERACTIVE MAP**

The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) put up (with some help from Google) an interactive map and SMS service for people to find their voter registration stations, registration status, and polling station on Election Day. It also included a candidate finder. The IEBC’s partnership with Google was “to provide open source technology powering their online voter tools,” including registration confirmation online and over SMS, mapping the polling stations, and a developer API.

**5.5 GotToVote**

GotToVote is a Code4Kenya pilot project, managed by OI, on behalf of the African Media Initiative (AMI) and the World Bank. It was originally built in just 24hrs to help voters register for the elections, after citizens complained that the official data released by the IBEC was too large to download and too cumbersome to use.

Code4Kenya developed the open-data GotToVote site to help Kenyans locate their nearest voter registration center. Also, Kenyan voters were able
to monitor election results and reports of election irregularities in their constituencies on Monday, thanks to added functionality on the popular GotToVote.co.ke election portal.

GotToVote allowed ordinary citizens to cut through all the ‘noise’ and hype generated during the elections to get easy access to the official election results for their counties, or local constituencies, when they became available from Kenya’s Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC).

“The media and political parties are all focused on the national results and on results affecting two or three of the higher profile presidential contenders. The ordinary citizen and their need to know about their local results is getting lost in all the hype. GotToVote seeks to change that, by giving citizens their local results, as soon as they’re available, and mashing up these results with other locally relevant data,” explains Open Institute executive director, Jay Bhalla.

During the elections, GotToVote users were able to send SMS and social media messages to friends and family, at no cost, reminding them to vote and urging them to support peaceful polling. After balloting closed, GotToVote users were able to track the election results for their constituencies, as well as track official reports of irregularities, election fraud, or other incidents in their neighbourhoods.

### 5.6 UhuRuto2013 MOBILE APPLICATION

Kenyan political outfit Jubilee Coalition launched a phone-based application dubbed UhuRuto2013 Mobile Application aimed at giving users access to latest information on its activities.  

The Android-compatible mobile app will allowed users, both at home and overseas, to access campaign speeches made by the Jubilee Coalition, TV interviews, debates of all nominated candidates and campaign music and videos by artists affiliated to the coalition.

The platform also hosted the manifesto and policy discussions by Jubilee advisory team and technocrats, as well as an open forum of the discussions and comments by Jubilee supporters.

The following are other apps that were developed to aid in the Kenyan election:

1. **WENYENCHI**

**Wenyenchi**: There were lots of candidate finder sites for the Kenya election. The one that seemed to have attracted the most attention was **Wenyenchi** that also had a mobile site and an Android app. It provided a good overview of candidates and an electoral boundary-finder. It highlighted the electoral boundaries via Google maps, allowed users to view information on the candidates in a given region starting from the

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county down to the ward. It also allowed users to keep track of the results as they were being tallied.

2. JIJULISHE

Jjulishe was an application based on the theme of civil education of voters. It was based on timelines of key events. Jjulishe app runs on native android. Among others, the app provided: Breaking down on the constitution, the roles of elected officials/leaders, boundary, voting procedures, the election timeline, etc.

3. TUKUMBUKE

Tumbuke was a web and mobile application that acted as an online digital post-election violence memorial experienced in Kenya in 2008. The aim of the application is to foster peace in the upcoming elections. It is like documentation of what happened in 2008.

4. SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight App was designed to provide the real time updates of what is happening on the ground through citizens participation. The main aim was to link Journalists with real time updates of what was happening on the ground from different locations in Kenya. The Application is also able to verify the user generated content.

5. RASLIMALI

Raslimali app was a map-based application highlighting where resources are in Kenya, including: social amenities like schools, hospitals, banks, mineral resources. It made use of open data information to populate the map. The essence of the application was to show the per capita expenditure of each county.

6. OPINION YETU

Opinion Yetu was Kenya’s first internet-based opinion polls.

1. HAKI II
This was a mobile app game meant for users to play for peace. It runs on java and android platforms. Some of the features of the app are: Messaging system, Quizy questions, Positive images (what we want) and Negative images (what we don’t want).

6.0 ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE KENYAN ELECTIONS

When Kenya held its general elections in 2007, internet penetration in the country was not widespread. But today, thanks to fibre-optic cables and increased mobile access, many Kenyans are running blogs and actively using social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

In Kenya, as stated earlier, close to 30 million of the country’s population are mobile phone subscribers accounting for over 75 percent of the population. It is therefore not surprising that internet penetration has increased with 14 million Kenyans subscribed, with a very high percentage of them accessing the Internet via their mobile phones. This makes Kenya one of the biggest Internet users on the continent falling behind only Nigeria, Egypt and Morocco.

Hence, with access to the internet made relatively affordable and easier, it is easier to understand why Social media featured prominently in the recent 2013 Kenyan national elections.

Kenya was enveloped in an uneasy air of uncertainty as the country prepared for its crucial first elections since they adopted a new constitution in 2010 which won them the praise and admiration of the international community. There was mixed feelings amongst the populace about once again facing an exercise which occasioned the calamity that befell them and caused them untold misery in 2007-2008.

With the ugly aftermath of the 2007-08 elections still fresh in their minds, Kenyans understandably dreaded another election-induced violence.

Hence, the call for peace in the 2013 general elections was deafening. The government, political candidates and their parties, the IEBC, the ELOG and other CSOs, NGOs and the common masses all contributed to the heartening and melodious cacophony of appeals and entreaties for peaceful elections. It was indeed a worthy endeavor in such a time where tension constantly runs high and passions easily inflamed.
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The election ended peacefully. It seems the efforts of all the stakeholders to ensure peace were fruitful as the country went through successful elections devoid of major violent incidents. The country has since returned to normalcy and the general atmosphere in the country is superbly calm. Though the defeated Coalition for Reform and Democracy (CORD) harbored some grievances, their decision to take their complaints to the courts and subsequently their graceful acceptance of the Supreme Court’s ruling which was not in their favor, is commendable and nothing short of a display of remarkable maturity, a respect for the constitution and a deep faith in the judicial system. Kalonzo Musyoka, vice president of Raila Odinga tweeted:

As the East African nation general elections got closer, online activity increased drastically. Social media mainly Facebook, YouTube and Twitter was widely used in the 2013 Kenyan general elections by both political aspirants vying for elective positions and the electorates looking for specific information. The online space became an increasingly important tool for outreach, engagement and reflection during the political process, admitted Markham Nolan, Storyful’s managing editor.

Whilst the political candidates turned to social media to reach out to the masses and sell their ideologies to them by explaining their campaign promises, policies, and manifesto on social media, the electorates utilized the same media to ask probing questions about the people who want to lead them, and also commented on topical issues as they naturally unfolded. It is also an undeniable fact, that CSOs, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), and other Independent electoral monitoring organizations made very good use of social media. For instance, the IEBC firmly engaged Kenyans through their resourceful Facebook page. This is a completely different picture as compared to previous general elections, when the phrase ‘social media’ made little sense to most Kenyans.

Social Media is a double-edged sword due to its potential to produce both positive and negative results, to serve both good and bad purposes. Since it was heavily adopted in the Kenyan elections, assessing its impact would be in order.

What impact did the influence of Social media had on the outcome of the elections? How
reassuring or threatening was this new media to the peace and stability of the country? Did it prove to be a good slave or a bad master?

In Kenya, like many African countries, there are deep-seated ethnic animosities which date back many years ago. During tension-fraught elections, these mild undertones of ethnic prejudice or ethnocentrism are rekindled by the negative or offensive political rhetoric of mostly unprincipled politicians who place their political ambition and the winning of the support of a particular ethnic group above national unity and cohesion.

During the 2007/2008 post-election crisis and violence in Kenya, hate speech on native language radio stations and online fanned ethnic tensions. This resulted in the infamous grisly and ghastly aftermath ever in the political history of Kenya - an ethnic-based bloodbath that led to the death of more than 1000 people with over 300,000 Kenyans rendered homeless.

Though social media was less utilized compared to the conventional media in events leading to the 2007 post-elections violence, Kenya’s post-election violence demonstrated the effects that new technology can have. It is acknowledged that technology and media hastened the transmission of snide remarks and tribal stereotypes that penetrated communities and mobilized individuals and groups for action against each other. In the 2007 elections, access to vernacular radio stations was high and mobile phones were widely available and were sometimes used in sending provocative text messages and mobilizing attacks on opposing communities. The National Human Rights Commission even confirmed that mobile phone text messages aided in mobilizing vigilante groups and mobs during the 2007-08 post-election clashes.

To curb this and prevent another possible mayhem, the Kenyan government issued an order to de-register all lines that cannot be traced to a known user in an attempt to clamp down on people sending out provocative texts.

However, some reasoned that such noble and well-intentioned efforts by Kenyan authorities to halt the use of mobile phones to incite violence could be thwarted by the arrival of affordable smart phones on the Kenyan market which has increased internet use on cell phones and generated an explosion in the use of social media. Even if they succeeded in preventing unknown mobile phone users from sending out provocative text messages, stopping those people from using social media to advance their cruel intention would be more of a herculean task.

As a result, the Kenyan government laid out strict guidelines to tamp down hate speech as the country prepared to hold the 2013 general elections. The new regulations, called "Guidelines for the Prevention of Transmission of Undesirable Messages via Electronic Communication Networks", were announced in Nairobi on Wednesday, October 24, 2012.

The guidelines monitored messages sent via mobile phones as well as content disseminated on social media networks to ensure no offensive or inciting messages were posted on Twitter and Facebook, said Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Communications, Bitange Ndemo.

In the 2013 Kenyan elections, the explosion of social media and the proliferation of mobile phones in addition to the everyday access to the traditional media vastly expanded the means of spreading information and this posed a serious threat to the stability of the nation. The explosion in the use of social media on the political
landscape particularly presented numerous challenges to the government in its attempt to sanitize the media landscape to halt the circulation of offensive tribal remarks which partly serve as the basis for electoral violence in Africa.

The rising influence of social media throughout the 2013 elections was unsettling as it engulfed partly tech-savvy Kenyans in an uneasy air of uncertainty as to its impact on the whole electoral process. It is not strange that many a Kenyan dreaded a repeat of the 2007 bloodletting which cost them many lives and loss of properties. With measures put in place by the government to check and monitor the traditional media and social media, and the use of mobile phones in sending provocative text messages almost fully tackled, many people still harbored doubts and feared that social media would serve as a convenient platform for disgruntled people to stoke tribal tensions with their inflammatory postings due to the peculiar difficulties in fully arresting the dangers of this new media.

Needless to say, the threat of social media was real. With few weeks to the elections, the harsh tone and the barrage of incendiary statements that were circulating on social media forced the government to intensify its efforts in tackling hate speech on social media. The Kenyan Ministry of Information and Communication even announced that those engaged in hate speech on social media could face fines up to $11,000 and three years in prison.

The NCIC set up by the government to monitor hate speech on social media also established a department headed by a cybercrime expert to scan social media for incendiary language. Dozens of offenders were identified on Facebook, Twitter, and on blogs. The commission even referred some of the offenders to the director of public prosecution who might eventually face jail time.

The government also appointed a team to monitor hate speech on social media which included the Head of Civil Service Francis Kimemia, Ministry of the Interior Permanent Secretary MuteaIringo, and Ministry of Information and Communications Permanent Secretary Bitange Ndema. The team was charged with identifying individuals using social media to disseminate hate speech that may incite violence. The team collaborated with the National Cohesion and Integration Commission and the National Steering Committee on Media Monitoring, which issued a warning to bloggers using their websites to promote ethnic division, threatening to hold them publicly responsible.

Besides establishing bodies to monitor social media for hate speech, the government brought in the Umatic team and the country's National Human Rights Commission to also assist. The Umatic project is a “dangerous speech” monitoring project built on Ushahidi’s Swift River platform. The sole aim of Umatic which is an initiative of iHub Kenya, a technology innovation and research centre based in Nairobi and software developer, Ushahidi, was to monitor and report dangerous postings online by Kenyans to the authorities. This project sifted through social media, blogs and comment sections on news articles to analyze the type of language used on these mediums in discussion of the elections. Some of the sites Umatic had been monitoring like Mashada.com even shut down due to some vitriolic speeches and inflammatory postings by its users.

Over the past few years, social media has emerged as a very powerful frontier for mass communication. Though Kenya lags behind other countries in terms of numbers on Facebook and
Twitter, Kenya remains a strong rival in terms of usage and articulating issues. Kenya has been able to stage quite a number of social media initiated success stories like the successful #Kenyanforkenyans campaign, and they have been able to replicate those accomplishments in the 2013 general elections too.

The enthusiasm of Kenyans in the electoral process and their willingness to ensure peaceful elections were clearly evident by their keen observation, monitoring and participation in election proceedings as displayed on social media. They were constantly alert to and reported any incident capable of inciting violence through their Twitter account and Facebook pages. On social media, people of good will assisted both the government and other social media-monitoring bodies to identify and contain violent situations before they escalated.

For instance, Uchaguzi, an incident-mapping website which was designed to aggregate reports of both potential and actual violent incidents received crowd-sourced reports as high as 480 per cent since the polls began.

From the beginning of the polls, Kenyans turned to the incident-mapping service with 770 events listed on the website at one point. Many of them declared “everything is fine”. Three days later, the number of reported incidents by the public via SMS and Twitter soared to 3,805 incidents. However, this time, the number of negative events rose but the majority of negative reports related to procedural issues rather than security threats. Only 396 security incidents were listed on the website, mostly pertaining to threats of violence.72

However, as Kenyans increasingly became worried about the integrity of the election results amidst claims of rigging and vote doctoring by the parties of the presidential candidates, reports of voting irregularities, registration problems, polling station difficulties, counting irregularities and results announcing rose.73

Besides the Uchaguzi website that gave anyone with internet access the opportunity to report incidents and to also peruse reported cases of incidents of both potential and actual violence, there was also an Uchaguzi Twitter hashtag - #Uchaguzi. Voters reported any intimidating issues and the general atmosphere at the polls by posting Twitter messages with the hashtag #uchaguzi (the Swahili word for "election"). A group of volunteers tracked the messages and alerted local officials when necessary.

The high number of reports citizens sent to the Uchaguzi website and the Uchaguzi hashtag attest to how active Kenyans were on social networking

**Note:**

sites. Social media gave the teeming crowd of technologically savvy Kenyans not only a collective voice to denounce any untoward speech or action that could mar the electoral exercise, but notably gave them an important platform where they could report potential incidents of violence to be checked and contained before they got out of hand.

Using the hashtag #KOT – Kenyans on Twitter- a community of Kenyan Twitter users proved that the social network can indeed be a powerful tool for shaping the national narrative. The outspokenness of Kenyans especially on social media came to the fore on this platform. Kenyans on Twitter tackled almost every issue related to their country particularly the elections – from calls to ensure free and fair elections to debunking false alarms raised by both indigenous people and the foreign media.

For instance, when CNN aired an alarming report that some Kenyans were preparing for violence in the Rift Valley, Kenyans on Twitter reacted strongly to the baseless report using the hashtag #SomeoneetellCNN. Few days later, CNN removed the video from the internet and calmed the nerves of Kenyans on Twitter by recounting their long-standing relationship with Africa including the many excellent stories they have covered on Africa:

Through Facebook, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) connected with voters like never before. Their Facebook page was very informative and resourceful in updating voters on any election-related development. Social media made it easier for the IEBC to reach the masses and sometimes break down the complex voting procedures so that ordinary voters could be easily engaged and included in the decisive process of electing their leaders and representatives.

However, the anxiety social media created could pass as one of the negative consequences its emergence brought on the entire country. There was undue tension and anxiety in the midst of incessant online vitriol. While Kenyan media outlets were debarred from reprinting hateful messages, everyday some Kenyans shared inflammatory thoughts online with authorities largely unable to stop them. It's not just ordinary Kenyans who were stoking the flames either – a junior Member of Parliament was arrested for inciting violence in a YouTube video.

Moreover, the stringent measures and numerous initiatives adopted by the government in sanitizing the social media platform brings to the fore another downside of the explosion of social media in the Kenyan elections – cost. The cost of monitoring social media was very high and time-consuming. Huge amount of resources that could otherwise have been used for mainly developmental purposes were committed to ensuring that what people post and comment on social media is nothing short of civility and tolerance. The acquisition of expert monitors and advanced election-monitoring or social media monitoring technological equipment require huge capital outlay. Besides, the government had to spend money in employing technology and cyber-crime experts to man and monitor sophisticated machines while the recruitment of lay volunteers to assist the process also required much financial commitment.

Aside the unnecessary burden social media imposed on Kenya in terms of financial drain, it also led to the marginalization of the poor and the rural folks in terms of contributing towards shaping both political and national agenda. Tim
Unwin properly noted: “as richer individuals and countries have ever-faster Internet access, enabling them to use ever more creative social media, those who simply do not have the physical access, or cannot afford it, become ever more distanced from the political processes that such technologies permit”.

Though many Kenyans have access to mobile phones through which they access the internet, not all of them are technologically savvy. Most of the less-privileged possess little knowledge about new technology and therefore makes it difficult for them to contribute to the political discussions online. Therefore, it was the elite and the city dwellers who made the most use of ICT and social media in shaping the political rhetoric and the national narrative. This pushed the majority of the citizens outside the realm of civic participation in national affairs and rendered them mere onlookers whilst their destinies were being shaped by a few people.

Nevertheless, the positive contribution of social media towards the electoral process far outweighed the challenges it presented. Besides the anxiety that the advent of social media created during the elections, the huge cost it imposed and the barrier to participation in the democratic process it served to the non-tech savvy citizenry, its role in the recent elections towards ensuring national cohesion and stamping out tribalism was phenomenal. The contributions of this relatively new media towards ensuring a transparent and credible election were unprecedented and immense.

Firstly, the task of weeding out war mongers and trouble-makers and ensuring a smooth running of the process was not left to the security agencies alone, thanks to social media. Social media empowered the masses to aid, co-operate and complement the efforts of the security agencies in discharging their duties towards protecting the country from another possible mayhem. The security forces were not overstrained. With the aid of social media, the security agencies were given accurate and timely information and direction to problematic areas unlike previous times where they only needed to rely on reports of the conventional media which were sometimes too late or not very accurate and precise. Social media ensured a direct link between citizens and the police where the police followed constant reports from people in trouble spots.

Secondly, Social media also took civic participation and social activism to a whole new level. Ordinary Kenyans who otherwise lacked the platform to voice their thoughts and opinions on topical political issues found their voice on social media. While some young Kenyans were actively lambasting politicians for perceived or real corruption charges and greed, they did not relent in occasionally sharing their thoughts on the whole electoral exercise and other related developments as they unfolded. Below are but few of the political comments Kenyans shared online:

![Comment 1](image1)

![Comment 2](image2)

![Comment 3](image3)
The country’s burgeoning internet users, most of whom comprises the youth, were particularly drawn into the whole election hysteria when especially almost all of the presidential aspirants created Facebook pages in order to reach the youth with their message. Thus, even social media users who were less interested in politics and the political ambitions of politicians for once could not resist the hubbub that the electoral process created on Facebook. With most of the conversation on Facebook concentrated on the elections, one could not help but join the political discourse.

During the elections, Facebook pages were flooded with political messages and comments with people justifying why some candidates should be voted for and others questioning the integrity of the aspirants and the electoral process. The leading presidential candidates, Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga, garnered hundreds of thousands of “Likes” on their Facebook pages and they capitalized on this to mobilize their supporters on social media to come out and vote massively for them. Many responded and this contributed to an increase in the voter turn-out to an unprecedented level.

Kenyans turn out in their numbers to vote

Thirdly, voter education and participation was highly encouraged. Social media served as an unofficial platform for civic education on the entire political process. Many Kenyans learnt more about electoral proceedings and other election-related developments on social media through people’s comments, suggestions and questions on Facebook and Twitter. Almost every issue on the election was discussed on Social Media. This enabled people to make informed choices and contribute meaningfully to the political process.

Fourthly, it supercharged citizen journalism and contributed to fair and accurate reportage in the industrial media. Many Kenyans used social media to voice their concerns and challenged the mainstream media and government reports, raising local citizen journalism to another level.

This particularly ensured a balanced and unbiased reportage by the local conventional media unlike the 2007 elections where “the media merely amplified institutional viewpoints, drawing on tribalised political views and assumptions as the natural perspective, rather than providing alternatives views”. (Munyua, 2010) According to Alice Munyua, The media in the 2007 elections were polarized and co-opted during election and post-election violence, and ownership tended to influence the kind of partisanship a media house would adopt.

Five years down the lane, the story is quite different with the advent of social media. The recent elections have shown that the bloggers in Kenya are giving the local media houses a tough competition in terms of churning out news. Though a number of Kenya media houses responded well by opening up micro-blogging platforms such as Facebook pages and Twitter
handles for their programmes to enable their readers get news in real time, the bloggers seemed to enjoy a comparatively massive audience.

One blogger observed, “The reason we have a large audience unmatched by these media houses is because we tell the truth. We report it as it is and do not go into the bed with politicians. We cannot be manipulated.”

The intense competition in the media landscape by bloggers and other social media enthusiasts has forced the traditional media to sit up and to also ensure that their reportage is devoid of bias and prejudice that portray their political leanings in order for them to retain their audience, as already many Kenyans are switching from the traditional media to social media for accurate, fair and real time news.

Fifthly, Social media gave Kenyans a powerful platform and a timely opportunity to add their voice to the never-ending calls for peace in the elections. Kenyans turned to social media in droves to appeal to their fellow countrymen to be tolerant and exercise patience in order not to mar the beauty of the democratic exercise. The call for peace constantly reverberated throughout the pages of Facebook and Twitter.

When tribal verbal attacks raised its ugly head in the election on especially social media, Kenyan celebrities, important personalities and the ordinary people found no convenient platform to debunk and denounce them than on popular social media platforms.

Many of them turned to Facebook and Twitter to condemn the vitriolic remarks posted online. They succeeded in drawing attention to some of the unfortunate remarks people have made on social media and openly condemned them while advocating for the need for political tolerance.

Kayamba, Africa's lead vocalist wrote on his Facebook account: "Friends , I have many friends from all walks of life, including all tribes in Kenya, however they do not include a tribe that uses indecent, abusive, language and pictures against one another, I will block you , whichever side you are for or against, one love!"

Similarly, Grapevine TV host, Anyiko Owoko decried the spate of tribal remarks on her Twitter account: "I feel as sad as I felt after the 07 elections. Only this time, nobody was killed but tribalism was resurrected in the name of democracy."

Radio presenter, Linda Adongo however expressed optimism, "Like animal farm, redemption song we shall sing. One day equality will be the real. The biggest tribe will be Kenyan. For now we wait ha!"

Kiko Romeo's Ann McCreath appealed for patience and tolerance: "The electoral process was a mess, but we were patient with the #IEBC. Let's be a bit more patient with the court and wait for their opinion on whatever evidence is tabled. Let's be tolerant of diverse opinions & cultures. I long for the day when we talk political ideologies and respect the divergence regardless of who voices them."

The Moipei quartet account read in a worshipful tone: "Let us not forget God now that the elections have passed, let us praise him day and night till the end of time. God Bless Kenya."

Last but not least, powerful slogans such as “Give peace a chance”, “vote for peace”, “say no to

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74 Kerongo, Grace (March 12, 2013).”Kenyans Celebs Deal with Tribalism Online”

http://allafrica.com/stories/201303121417.html
turalism” “peace wanted alive” “talk about peace” “vote wisely, vote for peace” among others were commonplace on social media. Even though, the effectiveness of such words on social media is frequently questioned, the penetration rate of social media in Kenya is beyond questioning. Since it is believed that those who use social media can shape public opinion, and can easily influence those without access to the internet, the soothing effects of such brief words on social media and their ability to calm the nerves of disgruntled people cannot be over-emphasized.

One would not be far from right to admit that social media played a wonderful role in ensuring the credible election and the peace that the country saw and enjoyed in its elections. Social media acted as enabler providing a positive role in mediating divergent perspectives, and ensured a national vision of unity and cohesion. It served as an avenue for dialogue that went a long way to minimize polarization and reoriented the people through brief but constant reminders that they are one people with a common destiny.

The credit for the successful and peaceful election can be rightly shared between the government who tirelessly put in place pragmatic measures to ensure that the freedom of expression is not abused, and the peace-loving tech-savvy Kenyans who relentlessly cautioned their colleagues against the use of provocative speech and even condemned those who did that when necessary.

Though the elections have ended, it is apparent that social media would continue to serve as a valuable tool in the hands of both elected political candidates and the general public. It would continue to serve as an interactive platform and a two-way channel that would connect the governors to the governed, thereby permanently bridging the yawning gap that once existed between government and the ordinary Kenyans.

Government officials would be certainly careful so as to discharge their duties efficiently and effectively being aware of the fact that every step they take and every decision they make would be thoroughly monitored, scrutinized, analyzed, and judged on social media by the tech-savvy Kenyans.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

In spite of all the fears and uncertainties, the Kenya elections came to a peaceful end. Though many feared social media would be instrumental in fostering violence through the transmission of hate speech, it rather proved to be a powerful tool for social activism, a channel for political campaigns and an avenue for civic engagement and participation in the entire political process.

Gradually, social media is shifting the balance of power in favor of the citizens, and thus, the "World is becoming more democratic and reflective of the will of ordinary people." It seems ordinary citizens who hitherto had no say in the day to day running of the affairs of the nation have found their voice on social media, and are therefore contributing to political discussions and helping shape the national agenda.

Despite assurances that there would be no repeat of the election violence that left more than 1000 Kenyans dead in 2007, there were few incidents of violence as the polls opened. For instance, an armed attack on a police station in Mombasa killed 10 people including two police personnel just hours before voting kicked off. The attack was blamed on a secessionist group known as the

75 Gogineni, Roopa“’Vote wisely, vote for peace’ social media comments on Kenyan elections”
http://www.english.rfi.fr/node/145427
Mombasa Republican Council. According to reports, in the coastal town of Kilifi, men armed with machetes attacked and killed five people at a polling station. Another incident was a stampede in Ketengela that left 20 people in need of medical attention.76

Despite these few pockets of violence and skirmishes, the elections generally were successful and peaceful. Social media networks Facebook and particularly Twitter were awash with praises from Kenyans, who have been impressed with the peaceful nature of the elections. Kenyans on Twitter also praised voters and congratulated one another for exercising patience and tolerance to make the elections a success.

7.1 Did Social Media Contribute towards ensuring peace?

Interestingly, whilst some have hailed the positive role social media played in the elections, others think that its inevitable adoption in the elections was unnecessary since it added nothing meaningful to the electoral process but rather caused unnecessary anxiety in terms of derisive posts and comments by unprincipled users.

Despite the huge amount of resources, time and energy that were committed to monitoring social media there were still pockets of violence. However, there were no major violent incidents that could have plunged the whole country into mayhem akin to the 2007 post-election violence. This is because measures were put in place to tackle the causes of violence.

The major cause of violence in the 2007 post-election violence was the propagation of hate and dangerous speech by both politicians and other Kenyans. During the 2013 general elections, hate and dangerous speech was profoundly addressed through many channels, including social media. The government and other stakeholders in the elections made sure that the Social media platform became an avenue for political discussions and not a platform for spreading provocative messages.

In general, the contribution of social media towards ensuring peaceful elections in Kenya cannot be gainsaid. In Kenya, majority of those who use social media are mostly literates and they wield the ability to influence both public opinion and actions of people. The influence of these few people was very important in promoting peace. Social media was very significant in influencing the sophisticated online community to be first of all peaceful and secondly to exert their influence on their communities for peace.

Indeed, Social media afforded Kenyans an additional platform to advocate for peaceful elections. It afforded the ordinary Kenyan an opportunity to add his or her voice to the incessant plea for peace in the elections.

Social Media thus complemented the efforts by the government, the electoral body, civil society organizations (CSOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the security service in achieving peaceful elections.

7.2 Was the electoral outcome shaped by social media?

Social Media has proven to be an integral part of the 2013 Kenyan general elections. All the major stakeholders in the elections – the government,

76 Voters Go To The Polls In Kenya (UPDATED), Social Media Reaction (http://african.howzit.msn.com/voters-go-to-the-polls-in-kenya-updated)
political aspirants, political parties, CSOs, NGOs, the security services, technology firms, and the electorate – showed a strong presence on social media.

Social media affected almost every facet of the elections – from campaigning, through monitoring of the electoral proceedings to the incessant calls for peace. This begs the question: Did the influence of social media affect the electoral outcome also? In other words, did the popularity of the political candidates and their parties on social media have any correlation to real votes on the ground?

It is worthy to note that the fight for votes began on Social Media where the presidential candidates frantically sought the attention of each and every Kenyan with campaign promises, colorful pictures of their campaign tours and rallies, and updates on their political activities. It was a step in the right direction since global politics are currently affected by the influence of social media; social network users are believed to be more politically engaged. In this technological epoch, the more “Likes” and the more “followers” politicians acquire on Facebook and Twitter respectively could correspondingly increase their popularity and brighten their chances of capturing the highest office of the land.

Many of the presidential candidates performed excellently on social media especially Facebook in terms of virtual support. Peter Kenneth, Martha Karua, Uhuru Kenyatta, Raila Odinga and Mudavadi all garnered significant support on Social Media. However, it seemed massive support on social media did not translate into real votes on the ground. Some of the presidential aspirants garnered more “likes” on their Facebook pages than the number of votes they got on the Election Day.

Peter Kenneth performed abysmally in the polls but he had an impressive Facebook following. By Facebook following Kenneth was just behind Martha Karua and Uhuru Kenyatta, with 242,340 and 449,885 followers respectively. Kenneth’s 205,000 followers far surpassed Raila Odinga’s 122,800 followers or Musalia Mudavadi’s 33,000, though both beat him in terms of real votes. The case of Peter Kenneth is just the same with Martha Karua, who garnered just 43,881 votes, far less than the whopping number of people (242,340) who ‘liked’ her on Facebook.

This inconsistency in both virtual and real support gives rise to several conclusions:

1. From the above, it appears that higher virtual support on social media does not have any impact on real votes. To solve the puzzle as to why some aspirants had more virtual votes than real votes, it could be explained by the fact that those candidates attracted the following of international fans, individuals who failed to vote or probably Kenyans who like their personalities but voted for either of the leading contenders because they felt that a vote for Karua or Kenneth would be a wasted vote since they don’t stand a better chance of winning the elections. In such cases, the virtual votes will have no impact on actual votes.

2. The tribal element cannot be ruled out in many an African election. Social media indeed played an influential role in the elections – but not in the selection of the presidential candidate and other political victors. This is because elections in

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Africa in general are mainly determined by ethnic alignments and loyalty.

It doesn’t matter how impressive a candidate’s manifesto is or how intimidating his supporters on social media are. Africans especially vote not only for people they can identify with but candidates who they believe can represent them as a people and champion their interests. To many Africans, such people are mostly their fellow tribesmen and women. Also, because of deep-seated tribalism and the “us versus them” attitude, people feel their existence and interests are threatened if the men in the corridors of power do not hail from their ethnic groups or tribes.

Most people in Africa feel content to have their own tribesman in charge of affairs even if he is corrupt and lacks the abilities, knowledge and experience to discharge his duties. Very few people vote based on competency in especially Africa.

3. Social media does not provide an accurate gauge of the electoral chances of the candidates since it does not provide a uniform representation of voters on the internet. A candidate can have low popularity on social media but may however be highly popular on the ground. What this means is that, a candidate can have a larger sector of supporters who might not be technologically literate or may not have access to the internet due to their geological location or economic standing.

In other words, candidates who have a higher number of tech-savvy supporters would enjoy massive support on social media whereas candidates whose main supporters comprise illiterates may not show a strong presence on social media. However, on the ground the candidate with many illiterate supporters or less technologically inclined may be more popular than the one who commands the following of elites or tech-savvy supporters since it a fact that illiterates constitute a majority of the population in most African nations including Kenya.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to dismiss social media numbers as entirely irrelevant. The fact that the statistics did not hold true for some candidates does not mean that virtual support cannot translate into real votes. For instance, the presidential candidate with the largest followings on Facebook and Twitter, Uhuru Kenyatta emerged the winner. His combined social media following on Facebook and Twitter was around 571,870. Accordingly, Uhuru Kenyatta garnered 6.17 million votes which were more than ten times his social media following. In this instance, virtual votes translated into actual votes and thus it seems popularity on social media could influence electoral outcome, though not all his online or social media supporters might have actually voted for him.

It appears Social Media has the power to shape electoral results considering the fact that the winner of the Kenya elections was also the most popular on social media. According to statistics, the online community in the run-up to the elections mentioned three presidential candidates the most, starting with Abduba Dida followed by Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga.

There is a correlation here between these statistics and the actual voting patterns, except for Dida, who was a distant fifth in the election. The other two, Kenyatta and Odinga, were first and second respectively after the vote count.

However, it can also be argued that the striking performance by Kenyatta and Odinga in terms of actual votes amassed was not precipitated by their massive online popularity. This is because both Kenyatta and Odinga already enjoyed great popularity on the ground. Apart from Dida, the
heavy online presence of the other two, Kenyatta and Odinga, was not surprising at all but very natural since they were the leading contenders in the elections and anyone of them was tipped by many to be the next Kenyan president.

In sum, Social media in itself holds very little chance in determining an electoral outcome. Being popular on social media alone is not enough to win more real votes on Election Day. Candidates who enjoy massive support on social media and go on to win elections are the same ones who already had tremendous support in the real world. Therefore, it can be concluded that, those who are very popular on the ground inevitably become popular on social media and this increases their chances of capturing political power.

Uhuru Kenyatta and President Obama of USA are typical examples. On the ground, they were very popular and this reflected on social media in terms of huge virtual followers. They could then go ahead to win the presidential seat.

On the other hand, it is virtually impossible for candidates with very low support on the ground but enjoy massive popularity on social media to win elections. A significant case in point is the Kenyan presidential aspirants Abduba Duba and Martha Karua who according to statistics were highly mentioned by the online community together with Kenyatta and Odinga. Martha Karua for instance had a large Facebook support.

But since they had no real support on the ground, their popularity on social media with the online community was next to nothing since the total number of votes they got in the actual elections did not reflect their online support. Abduba Dida came fifth in the elections while Martha Karua finished sixth.

7.3 Social Media Deepens Kenya’s Democracy

The Kenya elections have clearly demonstrated the positive role social media can play in an African election. Indeed, the new media has come to stay and it will continue to be a force to reckon with in every major elections. It would continue to be used by political candidates and electorates to pursue their interests and constantly provide equal platform to both the former and the latter to discuss the challenges of their country and how best they can be addressed.

The positive contributions of social media towards the Kenyan elections and the country’s democracy in general were immense. Social media greatly enhanced civic participation in the elections via voter education. It also helped bombard Kenyans with countless peace messages while addressing the use of provocative speech. Social Media reports helped the security agencies to act swiftly to both potential and actual violent incidents by linking the security agencies to ordinary citizens through social media monitoring bodies.

There is a positive correlation between credible elections and democratic consolidation. While unsuccessful elections mar the democratic exercise, credible elections strengthen the relevant political institutions, deepen the tenets of democracy and – not least – grant the eventual winner the much needed legitimacy. Thus, Social Media significantly enhanced Kenya’s democracy by contributing to the country’s free and fair elections.

Every successful election in any country is a major feat for Democracy since multi-party democracy hinges on free, fair and credible elections. It is during elections that the power of
the common citizen is clearly seen and accorded the attention it deserves. With the thumb, citizens wield the power to elevate people to higher public offices of the land or eliminate public officials who are deemed non-performing or corrupt. Successful elections give meaning to the old but timeless definition of Democracy as “a rule of the people, by the people and for the people”. Elections enable citizens to not only hold the people into whose hands they entrusted their power accountable, but to also have a powerful say in the process of shaping the national agenda and steering the affairs of the state through their elected representatives. The will of the people therefore reigns supreme in governance.

Needless to say, the democratic process is deepened and consolidated when the choosing of a nation’s leaders are successful and credible. On the other hand, the process is derailed when this vital electoral exercise is compromised by irregularities, fraud and mayhem. The 2007 Kenyan electoral disputes and the subsequent violent outbursts is a case in point. In such cases, the will of the people is not reflected in governance and the legitimacy of the leaders is not only questioned but resented. Indeed, the failure of the electoral process can plunge the whole country into a mob rule or worse still, an authoritarian regime where the freedom of the people to whom power belongs is sometimes woefully curtailed.

The success of the 2013 Kenyan elections is a major leap towards democratic consolidation and the deepening of the democratic process in Kenya. The new leaders are armed with the important conviction that they have the legitimacy to control the direction of the state for a four-year tenure. The people are likewise confident that those elected are the ones they truly want to be in charge, and are therefore prepared to fully cooperate with them.

Whilst many bodies, institutions, agencies, and other factors contributed to the success of the elections, the contributions of social media towards the 2013 Kenyan elections conspicuously stand out. It completely opened up the electoral space and empowered the Kenyan people from all walks of life to monitor and contribute to every stage of the election proceedings till it finally came to an end. It is therefore no wonder why all the relevant stakeholders in the elections were heavily present on social media. Social Media seemed to be the most utilized tool in the Kenyan elections, and its role went a long way to minimize any tendency towards electoral bias, manipulation, fraud or even tribalism which could have caused ethnic-based violence and distorted the whole process.

Using the success of the elections as a launch pad and a political spring board for future credible and transparent elections, Kenya has steadily set off towards the path of democratic consolidation as their political institutions become more independent and strong. The vital political institutions have been tested and stretched to their limits without crumbling in the midst of a turbulent whirlwind of pressure and agitation from every angle.

The successful nature of the 2013 Kenya elections has ignited a flickering flame of hope in the hearts of Kenyans and lighted up their eyes with firmly grounded optimism about their democratic future. It seems Kenyans can now confidently say a warm and permanent farewell to the depressing, distressing and dehumanizing era of electoral violence. It is now time for Kenyans to forge ahead into the future in unity, love, hope and
patriotism to accelerate the development of their beloved country in absolute democratic freedom.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the role of social media in tackling incitement and hate speech, there were still few pockets of violence in the elections. Thus the following actions points are recommended:

First, Social media is not the only platform for the dissemination of hate and dangerous speech. The traditional media and mobile phones are other means for the propagation of provocative messages and this was evidenced by the 2007 post-election violence where both the traditional media and mobile phones played sinister roles in inflaming passions and fueling tensions. Therefore, other platforms such as the traditional media which were accorded the same attention and vigilance given to social media in the 2013 Kenya elections should be constantly monitored together with social media in subsequent elections.

Second, though Kenya is one of the most active social media users in the African sub-region, a large chunk of the population does not use the internet or social media. There are approximately 42million Kenyans whereas it is estimated that less than 3million Kenyans use Facebook and Twitter. The few who use social media are mostly the urban-dwellers. Thus, targeting only social media users in an attempt to curb the spread of inciting postings would be a flawed exercise since there are majority of Kenyans who are not on social media. As a result, pragmatic steps must be rolled out targeting the many rural non-social media users.

Third, vitriolic speech is not the only catalyst for violence. Much electoral violence in Africa have been caused by polling clerk bias, perceived vote doctoring, suspicions of electoral fraud and manipulations by the government in power in collaboration with the electoral commission. Thus, tackling hate or dangerous language on social media and even the traditional media is not one-time antidote to electoral violence. Hence, the independent electoral and boundaries commission (IEBC) and other relevant state institutions should perform above board by continuing to discharge their duties with complete independence and fairness to win the trust and confidence of all Kenyans. This will help avert any suspicion of electoral fraud and manipulations and make it easier for citizens to accept the electoral outcome whether or not it is in their favour.

Fourth, the introduction of technology and technologically savvy monitoring teams into the elections to identify, publish and condemn the use of hate and dangerous speech on social media was highly commendable and needs to be replicated in any subsequent Kenyan elections and other major African elections.

Last but not least, technological devices used by the IEBC should be acquired in a considerable time before the elections and should be thoroughly tested to prevent future technological hitches which the IEBC encountered during the voting and tallying processes.
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