

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: LESSONS FROM KENYA

Kenneth Mwiti Murungi
Department of Social Sciences
Chuka University, Kenya
P.O BOX 109-60400, Chuka
ken.mwiti@yahoo.com

Abstract

Social media is a relatively new phenomenon in Kenya. It refers basically to communication and maintenance of relationships. Following recent global trends in the media landscape with the creation of increasingly powerful mobile devices and social networks, community development has dramatically changed over the past decade. Initial growth in Internet use in the 1990s resulted in many digital pioneers viewing new information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a means to radically empower people through new global connections and extensive social capital. This has extended into an interest in exploring how ICTs can contribute to international development, and particularly in the field of ICT for development (ICT4D). With traditional media such as newspapers and television now supplemented by social media, the situation is not well understood in Kenya with respect to; the acceptance of the digital divide in Kenya, development integration of social media into existing change efforts, and active participation and engagement on social platforms. Herein, this research defines what mobile social media is, what it is not, and how it differs from other media types. This research suggests that using social media is an appropriate strategy to promote development because of its participative, interactive, open and transparent nature. Based on research findings from a wide array of literature, the research identifies the main ways Kenya can use social media in strategic community development. This paper explores the influence of social media to community development in Kenya. The paper reviews literature from existing document analysis. The paper concludes that one cannot talk of community development in modern times, without the use of social media and that communities desirous of development in Kenya should embark on self - help efforts, as it is an impossible task for the government to develop every community simultaneously, due to paucity of funds.

Key Words: Social media, Community Development, Participation, Kenya

1.0 Background

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social networking sites are tools that allow users to create a personal profile of themselves containing information such as their age, location, and interests. These personal profiles can then be connected with family, friends, and colleagues, where information can be shared among one another. These connections create a network of users where anyone connected to the network can view everyone else's profile and, therefore, interact with them.

The United Nations defined the term "Community Development" as connoting the process by which the efforts of people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social, and cultural conditions of the communities, to integrate these communities into the life of the nation and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress. This definition connotes the members of a community taking initiative to engender development in their environment, with or without governmental agencies.

The rise of information communication technologies (ICTs), social media, or social networking sites (SNS) and the development of web 2.0 has led to a resurgence in the sort of utopian thinking that occasioned the early rise of the web and the first dotcom bubble of the mid-1990s (Wellman, 2001). The rise of Facebook as a global communications giant and social phenomenon, as recounted in the film *The Social Network*, caught even the Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg unaware. As Facebook

has expanded beyond its original home in university campuses and has been joined by endless new social networks – Twitter, Google+, reddit, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, plus countless others that have fallen by the wayside, there is increasing interest in social networking online and the new communities being created and recreated on these websites (Hargittai, 2007). For community development, the interest is in what new opportunities are offered by these technologies. Global initiatives such as One Laptop for Every Child have received substantial investment and attention as they seek to use the potential of ICTs to transform lives and deliver development (Toyama, 2011; Burnell and Hamdi, 2014).

The use of social media and social networking has become a significant force in political organizing, social interaction, and economic development. A growing body of literature now describes the use of social media as a tool in areas such as political action, democracy promotion, business marketing, and public relations management (Brown, et.al. 2009).

The use of social media specifically in the field of economic development has also recently begun to receive scholarly attention (Fernback, 2005). There is strong evidence to suggest that social networks can improve the socio-economic well-being of communities. Eagle et.al (2010) found the structure of social networks and related diversity of individuals' relationships is strongly correlated with the economic development of communities. However, with the dramatic changes currently taking place regarding information technology, there is a need to continually reexamine and analyze the use of social media and social networking in the field of community development.

Social media is emerging as an important entity providing a sense of check and balance to the government as well as setting the agenda for the society. There is more than can be thought of in the role social media plays in the development of any country. These roles are either direct or indirect, with most of them being facilitation (Wartella & Jennings, 2000). Among the

mainstream media in Kenya, there are more than 90 FM radio stations, 14 TV stations and unconfirmed number of print newspapers and magazines. Kenya's state-owned Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) remains the only broadcaster with countrywide coverage. It broadcasts in English and Kiswahili. *Royal Media services* is the largest private national broadcaster with countrywide coverage broadcasting in English and Kiswahili plus various vernacular languages. The biggest independent national, regional and specialized TV, radio stations and newspapers feature quality reporting with hundreds of applications for radio and television licenses pending before the Communication Commission of Kenya (CCK, 2008), which is the independent regulatory authority for the communications industry in Kenya. Despite these efforts, there is a gap in information that only social media can fill. This is because of its flexibility in access and receivers contribution to the content, a benefit that is unavailable in the mainstream media. In Kenya, media has contributed greatly in development of the nation. Its role as a tool for change cannot be undermined.

1.1 Objectives of the study

To bridge the gap in information about various contemporary relationships between social media and community development, this article seeks to answer to three objectives as follows:

1. Provide a definition and background of various social media and networking options,
2. Discuss the relationship between social media and networking to social, environmental, economic and political development, and,
3. Present a discussion of current challenges and potential future directions related to the freedom of social media and networking in community development.

To accomplish these objectives, I review pertinent literature and inventory current social media and networking options and provide an analysis relevant to the field of community development. The analysis is not meant to be a comprehensive overview of all social media and networking options, but rather I seek to invoke reflection and initiate future deliberation about the use of select technologies that I see as having the potential to transform the methods of dialoging, decision making, information sharing, and relationship building in the community development profession in the twenty first century.

2.0 Social Media and Development

2.1 Social Media and Politics

Kenya is a particularly interesting case study when it comes to the role of social media in politics. Kenya's mainstream media is constrained by a number of limitations. These include reliance on government advertising, state intimidation and a partisan corps of journalists strongly wedded to ethnic loyalties. The recent elections show that it is losing its place as the pre-eminent agenda setter in the country. That role is gradually being taken over by social media. The shift to social media is not particularly surprising. Internet penetration in the country is staggeringly high at 90%. The average internet penetration rate on the continent is only 31%. More important is what Kenyans use the internet for. According to Portland Communications, a UK based political and public relations consultancy firm, Kenya has

arguably one of the most active online communities on the continent after Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa.

Access to information is essential to the health of democracy for at least two reasons. First, it ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Second, information serves a “checking function” by ensuring that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them. The primary purpose should be to provide rapid-response technical assistance to support civil society programs. This component is shaping the legal enabling environment, strengthening constituencies for reform, removing barriers to access, training, and supporting the nation. Through this approach, Kenyans are able to get details of national concerns without intimidation or fear, they are able to exercise their democratic rights for example, voting and airing their views hence ability to make choices and participate in leadership.

The unprecedented growth in digital communication has given Kenyans a platform for political activism. With every General Election come intense political activity on social networks, hence it is safe to conclude that social media’s influence on the polls is becoming stronger than before. The impact of social media as a tool of political engagement is already being felt profoundly with the growth in the various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube.

According to the latest annual report, *The State of the Internet in Kenya*, by Nendo (2016), there are 6.1 million Kenyans on Facebook, up by 1.8 million users registered in 2015. The number of monthly active users on Twitter stands at 2.2 million with a million daily active users. WhatsApp is a popular chatting platform and is estimated to have 10 million users while Instagram and LinkedIn are estimated to have 3 million and 1.5 million respectively. Politicians know that the quickest way to make news is to put out a statement and avoid paying for advertisement space (standard media newspaper).

Citizens have also found a more reliable way to be heard by incumbents and aspirants is to tweet them directly or tag them on Facebook posts using the latter’s personal accounts without going through their personal assistants or secretaries. Experts attribute social media’s powerful influence in politics to the ability of the various platforms to hasten politicians’ and parties’ communication and reach potential voters in a more targeted manner and vice versa without the intermediate role of the traditional mass media.

With the majority of Kenyan voters being youthful, digitally literate, and with access to smartphones and the internet, the candidates to beat in the August polls will be the ones who effectively use social media. Through the various platforms they will easily conduct targeted grassroots-based citizen campaigns and voter mobilisation.

Significant social and political issues are discussed by Kenyans on Twitter (KOT as they are popularly known). The platform has become a powerful source of information and a point of reference for those disillusioned with the country’s mainstream media. The Kenyan social media scene is renowned for both its bravery as well as its bad behaviour. It’s force for good was shown when during the elections Kenyans on Twitter called politicians to order. Once polling started this group forced the electoral commission to respond to various allegations of electoral irregularities.

Before the material day of elections, the social media is involved in researching, conducting and publicizing opinion polls among the citizens. This influences their perceptions and they learn of the possible candidates for victory. This ensures flexibility and prevents violence that could arise as a result to accept defeat among the supporters of a candidate. After the elections, social media announces the winners of the said elections. In case of any irregularities, the citizens are made to know. A good example of this is what happened in Kenya 2007 general elections which was faced with cases of irregularities and media was the only way that Kenyans could get what was happening in various parts of the country. Social media creates knowledge among the citizens on who has been appointed in various offices e.g. the ministers in various government departments after the elections; hence the citizens are able to identify their leaders. It also makes the citizen aware of the agencies responsible for elections hence creating order. In case of post-election violence, knowledge has been created by social media among the masses on the extent of violence, cases of human right abuses, underway reconciliatory measures in place and the causes of violence. Social media airs news on inauguration and swearing in ceremonies for the elected political leaders in office. This is important to mark a new beginning among citizens.

But social media also had served as a platform for hate speech as many exploited the fact that they could post anonymously to abuse and threaten individuals and communities without fear of legal retribution. But the disruption of the agenda setting role of mainstream media doesn't mean that social media is providing the required corrective. Although social networks offer the fastest means to disseminate news, it does not enjoy the professional gatekeeping role of editors in traditional media. The low side of social media is that if not used responsibly, it may lead to distortion of public discourses and fan ethnic animosities in young democracies like ours that previously witnessed ethnic-instigated violence. This has often given rise to cases of fake news, hence the need for verification of any information received before sharing on the various platforms. Use of language with negative ethnic innuendo must also be avoided as this is what spews the venom that may lead to flare-ups, especially in the aftermath of the elections when certain groups are not pleased with the outcome. Unless the Kenyan online community exercises caution in the use of digital social networks, it will have only itself to blame if the government decides to resort to drastic measures such as shutting down the internet, as happened in Uganda and Gabon.

The good news is that there are a number of initiatives going on to ensure responsible use of social media during and after the electioneering period. The Kenya Social Media Awards (SOMA), a platform that recognises and rewards individuals and organisations that have made significant contributions to the growth of social media, for instance, is partnering with Safaricom and OLX Kenya to educate various communities on the responsible use of digital networks. Through partnerships, the organisations are supporting various digital platforms such as the SOMA Connect, which engages various corporate organisations on effective use of social media, enhancing brands' equity and empowering the citizenry. Various corporate organisations rely on social media for profiling and brand enhancement and any irresponsible use can cause reputational damage. The Annual Olx SOMA Awards focus on recognition, education, and empowerment of targeted communities on the use of social media. Through the platform, various communities are able to make positive use of the media as a tool for

social transformation. With more such initiatives, social media enthusiasts will be instrumental in shaping the outcome of the polls without pandering to misinformation and hatred which may fan the embers of ethnic animosity during the electioneering period.

The social media in particular has come to represent the perfect example of the democratisation of information and technology with demonstrable capacity to migrate communication to interactive dialogue, and social activation. This is greatly evident all around the world with regards to its use for campaigns and enlightenment by political parties. Social media has also been actively involved in issues to do with democracy, as a watchdog for the government, in condemning political injustice, in airing results after elections and the winners; it discloses corruption cases among the politicians and conducts civic education among populations on elections. In Kenya currently the social media is responsible for airing parliament proceedings and civic education to the public concerning the new constitution.

Social media exposes evils among the political leaders and public office bearers. Through such activities it ensures that public resources are not misused but directed towards other development activities which are crucial for national development. Part of this effort has focused on publishing reports by investigative journalism, one element of a broader effort to assist the promotion of national integrity and the fight against corruption. The goal is to raise public awareness that “clean government” is every citizen's right, and that it should not be necessary to pay a bribe to receive a public service.

Social media educates the masses on their constitutional rights and discloses any events of their violation by governments, non-governmental agencies and individual persons or from any other possible source. It is the voice of the voiceless on such events and is involved in campaigns aimed at promoting the upholding of human rights. This is usually achieved by use of hash tags.

2.2 Social media and Economic Development

There is a crucial role played by the social media in bolstering economic development in transitional or developing countries. An array of research shows there are clear links between media freedom and economic development. Media affects the incentives of market participants by promoting competition in a particular sector, influencing the demand and supply of commodities through advertisement.

According to the survey conducted, state ownership of the social media tends to be associated with negative development outcomes, including more corruption, inferior economic governance and less-developed financial markets. Removing barriers to foreign social media investors or prohibiting concentration of ownership can strengthen the role of the media in economic development and media's role in supporting market development and providing people with access to market opportunities.

Economic-wise, the social media enlightens the citizens on the proceedings of the stock exchange, introduced e-banking, tips on investment programs, opportunities for business, new inventions in the market among other things as discussed in this report. Social media has come up with a new banking system to supplement the traditional banking systems. Today one can pay bills and purchase items through the internet by the touch of a button.

On the economic front, the Social Media has become a market place of ideas and creativity. Products and services are sold online, thus providing opportunity for start-ups to commence businesses on a small scale. Many Kenyans, like citizens of other nations, have honed amazing entrepreneurial skills to make a living through opportunities provided by social media platforms, and have equally become employers of labour. Huge financial transactions have been conducted by individuals and organizations online. Banking transactions such as online deposits and transfers, have made financial transactions easier. In the past it was difficult to travel without physically going to transporting and tourism organizations to make booking and other logistics.

The Country's E-Commerce space is growing tremendously, companies such as *Jumia*, *OLX* and *Masoko* to mention just a few, are online Malls recording huge patronage by online customers. Also, the trove of information exchanged through social media by individuals, groups and institutions has impacted on all spheres notably; e-education, e-health, e-agriculture, crime prevention, and safety.

Social media has widely been used in commercial marketing activities. Business and markets encompasses different models through which its actionable plans are resulted into goals. According to Ray (1973), marketing communications are referred to the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, incite, and remind consumers about the brands they sell. Marketing communication enables organization to have dialogues with their consumers and can also serve as the voice of a brand (Ray, 1973). There are varied range of marketing communication methods that exists, that composed of all forms of promotion, advertising, publicity, public relations efforts, personal selling, and marketing (Keller et al., 2012).

According to Fisher (2009), marketing decision makers are under pressure to decide if they would participate in the new online communications available and also request to justify the cost of using traditional advertising tools such as TV or radio. Goode (2009) also sees social media as a very important tool for the marketing environment. His research found that 60 percent of planners use a minimum of 16 online leads every year using social media. He also concluded that financial planners majorly use Facebook. Using LinkedIn, created for business professionals, also provide information and opportunities for decision makers. Here, Fisher (2009) also pointed out that firms are designating different purposes of social networking sites. For example, LinkedIn is frequently used by human resources departments in organizations to recruit and select the proper candidates to available jobs openings. The same way organization employees' use 'glassdoor.com' to post ratings and reviews of their workplaces for service retention to applicants or businesses.

Most economic development organizations have recognized the enormous potential of social media for place marketing, boosting their SEO (search engine optimization) and engagement. Many start (quite logically and appropriately) with LinkedIn, as that network is specifically designed for business interaction. From there, many often branch out from there to Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram or Flickr.

Social media is dependent on internet penetration; India still possesses a lot of potential for the growth of internet penetration which would ensure parallel growth of social media. Internet and social media also have a tendency to improve the business prospects of a country as more than 70 percent of organizations operating around the world are now active on social

media and adoption of social media is widespread for businesses in the emerging markets of China, India and Brazil who on average are 20 to 30 percentage points more likely to use social media than counterparts in the UK, Australia, Germany or Canada.

Towards reaping the benefits of information dividend, the information infrastructure is a must as the government of Kenya is planning to establish the National Optic Fiber network, with an aim to provide broadband connectivity to Kenyans and with the deployment of 3G, 4G etc. Kenya could have more mobile broadband connections by the end of the year 2030.

The network would be like super highways where everybody would be connected and information will reach to the remotest person. The real benefit of video conferencing was for education and there were similar benefits for health, vocational education and other activities. The Government initiative to make the information accessible to each citizen through the information infrastructure. Which are meant for making the information available to the role is a step to grow the social media and related business.

Once the information infrastructure is established, it will boost up connectivity of people with government, business, small scale industries and open avenues for the growth of personal computing devices ranging from the smart phones, tablets to the PCs. The peripheral services provided by the increased use to the hardware would definitely multiply the growth driven by consumption, income, investment, employment, entrepreneurship and revenue. The people having information access will become connected to the social media networks and the dividend could thus be distributed. Now the government has initiated taking help of the websites for receiving public opinion on various policy issues.

It is no secret that social media has, and continues, to redefine the global landscape. Social media has often been looked at as a platform for communication and engagement between users, but it is drastically evolving beyond that. As today's consumer spends up to nine hours per day online, social media has proven to be the most effective way for businesses to reach new audiences on a global scale.

Social media is also helping to fuel the global economy by creating new jobs, democratizing information and pushing brands far beyond their borders. Before social media, brands had to pay top dollar for traditional online advertising that may not have reached their target markets. Now, businesses own and create their digital media content, breaking down the barriers to reach new audiences.

Although this social boom is fairly recent, it shows no sign of diminishing. In fact, we are at the height of what I like to call the digital gold rush - one created around the world as a magnitude of brands and influencers take to social media to target and engage consumers more effectively. The benefits that brands, users and the global economy can harness from social media are unmeasurable. From the creation of job functions to the availability of data and information, here are several positive outcomes of this digital gold rush and how it is fueling our economy. Brands have seen major shifts on the demand side with increased transparency, customer engagement and overall change in customer behaviors.

The "always-on" mentality of social media has called for the creation of jobs that never existed before in order to handle the impact social has on the business. Think "social media manager", this role did not exist 15 years ago, yet almost every big brand has one today (and if they do not, they should). Businesses are so invested in social media that it has created an

industry in and of itself. Businesses and tools that function strictly for social media and social media marketing are becoming more valued and readily available.

Social media influencers have also risen to popularity as a completely new form of entertainers and trusted sources of product information. Users look to social media influencers as the new “word of mouth,” often basing purchasing decisions on their opinions. The role of social influencer only became a viable job in the past five to 10 years, but today, they are a vital part of digital brand strategy. Big brands are planning to spend significant amounts year on influencer marketing alone and in total online media spend. Since its boom, social media has driven significant global economic growth by unlocking new opportunities and connecting people, brands and businesses more efficiently.

Prior to social media adoption, it was difficult for brands to consistently get their information out to a targeted audience. Social media has created a form of communication housed at our fingertips, where information, ideas and other content can be shared instantly, across the globe. This wide availability of information and data represents tremendous opportunities, especially in a professional capacity.

Today, social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Glassdoor are one-stop shops for job seekers to find information that was previously unavailable. For example, both platforms help users know their worth by using salary comparison tools that did not exist before social media. Current employees are encouraged to share salaries, benefits, positive or negative experiences, etc., online, which then become available to the masses.

2.3 Social Media and Social development

Socially, we are all witnesses to the volume of information shared on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Blackberry Messenger and Instagram, to mention just a few among several social media networks through which Kenyans interact, obtain information to meet their social needs to shape their behaviours and enrich the quality of lives. Current research indicates that media can contribute to a person's self-perception and affect their socialization in a variety of ways which can consequently impact on their social development (Wartella & Jennings, 2000). Existing research indicates that moderate media does not significantly impact a person's social skills and relationships with others either positively or negatively (Subrahmanyam, Kraut, Greenfield and Gross, 2000, VonFeilitzena and

Carlsson, 1999). At the forefront of concern is the fact that excessive media use may affect a person's social development through *social isolation* over time hence affecting interpersonal skills and social competence (Shields & Behrman, 2000; Valkenburg, 2004). For example, Concerns have been raised that people may be losing this social interaction and may be forming electronic relationships with the machine instead of friendships with their peers, hindering the development of interpersonal skills (Calvert, Jordan & Cocking, 2002; Subrahmanyam, Kraut, Greenfield & Gross, 2000; Shields & Behrman, 2000).

Social media is a main socializing agent among the children, it contains educative materials, promotes morals, entertains the masses as a means of spending leisure, provides tips on healthy living, campaigns against diseases e.g. HIV/AIDS, social networking like facebook by yahoo and twitter by google. Social media's beneficial effects include early readiness for learning, educational enrichment, opportunities to view or participate in discussions of social

issues, exposure to the arts through music and performance, and entertainment. Harmful effects may result from sensitization of violent behavior, exposure to subtle or explicit sexual content, promotion of unrealistic body images, presentation of poor health habits as desirable practices, and exposure to persuasive advertising targeting children (Influence on Children media, retrieved on Sept 23rd 07). Media acts as that double-edged sword that can hurt as much as help. Alternatively, some researchers believe social media has a positive social effect on children. Shared computers have been found to lead to group interaction and cooperation rather than social isolation (Wartella & Jennings, 2000)". Internet and videoconferencing technology allow students to participate in projects sponsored by researchers around the world. Satellite and Internet technology bring classroom students into direct real-time contact with leading scientists, (Williams, retrieved Sept 23 2007). In Kenya, this sense of global community as one of the largest benefits to education from media development has not been effective.

Digital media demands levels of digital literacy. This remains uneven because participation is determined in large part by class, age and geography. The progressive possibilities of social media are therefore tempered by the way in which it operates. Schools are constantly looking for ways to enrich their curriculum for students and provide educational tools for them that will help them with life further in time. That is why education and technology or the media go hand in hand in the 21st century. Schools are loaded with computers to help students with academic studies. Social media has affected the way students learn. Around the world students are being globally connected with one another via internet (Rolls, 2007). These mass media tools have made the world a smaller place in a way, also called (globalization). It is important that the educators of students themselves become media literate as an essential tool and topic in the new millennium (Schwarz, 2001). This will enable teachers to be more able to offer students information from around the world at an even faster and easier rate hence encouraging critical thinking in a media-dominated age (Schwarz, 2001). Media literacy in social studies allows future teachers to "uncover hidden assumptions, to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information, to recognize biases, to separate fact from opinion, and ultimately, to determine the strength of the message (Schwarz, 2001).

Significant too are the hierarchies that have emerged online. Those with the largest following tend to be politicians, celebrities, media personalities and those familiar with the digital literacy necessary to build a following. What these people say dominate conversations. The nature of agenda setting is thus personality driven. This is one of the most fundamental flaws of the online communication economy, and one that demands that we develop a deep circumspection about this new dawn in Africa.

Social media involves the use of various technological tools and methods for sharing and discussing information. Social media is a way to transmit or distribute information to a broad audience where users have an opportunity to create and distribute content. By comparison, social networking is the use of these tools specifically to connect and interact with others. Social networking is the act of engagement where groups of people with common interests are associated and build relationships through a shared community of interest (Stelzner, 2009; Hartshorn, 2010). For example, Facebook was created on the premise of linking individuals and organizations into various networks of common interests or associations. In community

development, one can use social media to facilitate social networking and conversely, one can network, form partnerships, and build relationships by leveraging social media. The use of social media and networking is significant as a community development tool in terms of building relationships, improving communications, documenting development efforts, sharing information in real-time, and informing and reaching a wider audience than was possible at any time in history.

In the health area too, social media have a strong influence on people's knowledge, attitudes and practices. The health sector has information to impart, information that is important and relevant to the health of the population. Typically, the social media have been used to market healthy behavior, which targets the individuals. That is also important as it informs about health risks. But the major determinants of health are in both the social and physical environment; and the power of social media can be used very effectively to make that environment healthier. For example the successful public litigation against the tobacco industry, HIV/AIDS (e.g. epuka mpango wa kando compaig), excessive intake of alcohol among others. Media is also involved in disseminating knowledge on proper diets for individuals necessary in prevention of diseases.

Social media, defined by its interactive nature and user-generated content, has largely been a tool and a toy for the wealthy and bored. Blogs, photo sharing sites, and online social networking sites have allowed peers (and increasingly organizations and companies) to share thoughts, messages, information, images, and videos. Development agencies have been utilizing social media for years, using blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms to publicize their vision, purpose, and activities; spread news; build support; attract volunteers and donors; and engage with interested segments of the population. Of humanitarian agencies, UNICEF is the most 'liked' on Facebook (1.2 million+) and the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, is the most 'followed' on Twitter (1.2 million+) with the American Red Cross, Doctors without Borders, and the World Food Program among others also having substantial social media followings.

Social media is the most commonly used source of entertainment. The public uses media for entertainment after a tedious working day or even when working. This refreshes a person's mind and body to concentrate again in a more productive activity that enhances development. It is important to remember that "Development" isn't the primary goal of most people – it's living and enjoying their lives. Martha Nussbaum rates Leisure and fun as a necessary component of life worthy of human dignity in her book *Creating Capabilities*, and Manu Joseph of the New York Times reminds us to "Let the Poor Have Fun" when talking about expanding access to the internet. While activism, cultural preservation, and accountability are laudable uses of social media, social media can also be fun and expanded access to leisure activities like online chatting and games should be seen as a valuable development outcome rather than a distraction or waste.

As social media penetrates further into developing markets a greater number of voices will be able to be heard on a global scale. This change is good for its own sake and it should also be embraced and utilized by development practitioners in our efforts to empower and communicate with communities.

Because of the nearly ubiquitous and equal access to social media and networking, citizens and practitioners alike can promote active, representative and diverse participation in community decision making. With new social media technologies, active participation through web conferencing or other real-time information sharing methods allows for interactive and hyper-responsive communication. With costs associated with information technology continuing to decline for many users, a more representative and diverse constituency can participate in various communication networks.

Using search engines and other social media opportunities, community developers now have access to more information than was ever possible in the past. Community development practitioners can now actively engage in learning and understanding about community issues, problems, and impacts with information literally at their finger-tips. Historical documents can be recorded and accessed easily, allowing for more efficient learning and better understanding of policies and actions.

Social media and social networking can enhance the leadership capacity of community members, leaders, and groups within the community through networking and power sharing. Information leading to decisions can now be more broadly disseminated and greater transparency and accountability can lead to increases in trust within and among various community members, leaders and groups. New and innovative Web 2.0 applications can promote online voting to allow more individuals to not only know intimately the specific details of various initiatives, but also be able to influence their outcome through direct participation or information dissemination to other constituencies via social networking.

The use of social media and social networking can disseminate information and dialogue on a full range of strategies toward long-term sustainability and wellbeing in the community. By allowing and promoting broad and extensive participation in dialogue about sustainability, difficult questions can be addressed about how sustainability is defined and how to balance the schism between science and values often imbued in sustainability discourse. Community wellbeing can thus be widely discussed and debated regarding short and long-term decisions with ownership and responsibility widely shared.

Furthermore, use of social media and networking addresses not only community development principles of good practice, but also addresses some of the fundamental tenets of good governance and democracy by allowing broad participation, promoting effectiveness and efficiency in processes and outcomes, promoting accountability and transparency, and allowing for fairness and equity.

On the other side, social media has its dark side in that often it influences the people negatively. The youths, children and adults are exposed to similar products for consumption without being keen to distinguish its consumers. This has promoted immorality among children and youths e.g. sexual immorality through phonographic literature, violence through violent programs and movies.

2.4 Social Media and the Environmental Conservation

On environmental issues, social media has led many campaigns aimed at environmental conservation. It has publicized emerging policies on the environmental sector and warned the population on the dangers of environmental conservation.

There is no doubt that the social media plays an instrumental role in modern societies. With regard to environmental policy, media have a central role to play especially in promoting environmental awareness and education. A recent example is the *global hour* campaign where social media and other environmental advocacy NGOs like WWF, called for a one hour of darkness on Saturday 27th March 2010 for people to switch off the light in their places to alert the global political leaders on the dangers of climate change.

In fact, social media has a two-pronged role. On the one hand, they help to explain the environmental policies, regulations and plans to the public and on the other they reflect the concerns of the public regarding different environmental problems and thus pressure the decision makers to solve a specific environmental issue.

On the macro-level in the environment field, we have a number of precautionary policy tools, such as environmental research, establishing protected areas and environmental planning, as well as a number of corrective policy tools, such as relocation of industries, replacement of old technologies with new and clean technologies and environmental monitoring. Social media play an influential role both as a precautionary tool to warn against potential environmental threats, suggest corrective solutions and as monitoring tool.

However, there is a difference in the way social media cover environmental events. Firstly, they differ in their degree of interest in addressing environmental issues. This is despite the fact that these issues affect people of all ages, religions, cultures and nationalities. Besides, the English-language media seem to be more mature in their approach towards addressing environmental problems, which is clear from the number of analytical articles and the range of environmental topics being discussed. Occasionally the social media tend to just report or describe without any analysis information related to the environment and in many cases they support the viewpoint of a specific organization or government entity. Discussion and analysis is a key element in raising environmental awareness.

It is worth mentioning that, in general, social media in Kenya in particular are not very concerned about environmental issues. Issues relating to politics, economics, sport, films or even music take precedence over environment-related issues.

In fact, environmental issues are linked to all these issues and, therefore, should figure prominently in the media. However, it is generally the case that the focus turns to the environment when there is a big event like the recent United Nations Climate Change Conference or there is a major environmental incident. Social media can make use of new presentation techniques and methods to get the message on the environment across to the public or the decision maker. Also, media should use easy, simple terms and hold an optimistic view towards environmental problems.

2.5 Social media constraints for community developers

There are many challenges and limitations that prevent or dissuade use of social media and networking to its full potential in the field of community development. First, the cost of some technologies, particularly mobile devices and their often expensive service contracts can prove prohibitive for many users. While the costs of computing (i.e., processors, monitors, etc.) have decreased markedly in recent years, technologies that provide easy access to social media and networking sites can be beyond the means of those in poverty or for those outside broadband access. Subsidies and scholarship can begin to address some of these issues as well as the recycling of “outdated” but still functional hardware such as personal digital assistants or mobile devices.

Second, the skills required to be social network savvy can be overwhelming, particularly to those without much time to invest in initial learning. There are necessary investments in terms of setting up accounts, learning new software applications, and the consistent maintenance (i.e., reading and processing) of data that may prove overwhelming to community developers, particularly those with little background in related types of technology.

Further, community members with whom community developers wish to engage may not be comfortable and willing to engage in virtual communications and relationships as part of their community and civic life. The potential alienation of people through virtual technologies, especially those who are already marginalized in communities, will continue to present a significant challenge. Significant investment by community development organizations, and the Community Development Society in particular, regarding training and skill building, will benefit not only individuals, but the profession as a whole.

Third, there exists a considerable digital divide between the “haves” and “have nots” that is neither easy to address nor uncomplicated to overcome. Clearly, there is increasing evidence that access to high speed internet connectivity is more readily available to urban populations than rural populations and ubiquitous access to web based technologies is still an aspiration for many. As a consequence, social networking tools may be a more accessible or a more appropriate application in urban contexts. Recognizing this digital divide and the fact that urban community development is quite different from rural community development will be critical toward addressing many of these fundamental issues.

Fourth, social media and social networking can actually exacerbate divisions of perspective and may work counter to the collaborative goals of many community development efforts that promote inclusiveness and diversity. New web-based technologies may promote a more introverted, solitary, and secluded populace with citizens either unable, unwilling, or uninterested in interacting face-to-face with their neighbors. Active citizen participation in the affairs of the future is described by Fischer (2000, p. 259) as the “raison d’être of democracy. Not only does citizen participation give meaning to the term, but it plays an important role in legitimating both policy formulation and implementation.”

Last, with the availability of seemingly immeasurable amounts of information accessible through social networking, the irony is that we have become lost in a sea of data. Web searches today can reveal an overabundance of information that may overwhelm the most technologically competent community developers. A concerted effort to continually manage and organize information related to community development will only serve to help practitioners navigate the morass of social media related to the discipline. Yet, as these many present and future challenges present themselves, there are also many opportunities and success stories for organizing in the field of community development.

Africa's upward trend in the use of social media is even more striking given the low number of Africans connected to the Internet and the many hurdles Africans face in trying to go online.

Africa's Internet users (more than 100 million at the end of 2010) represent just a small percentage of the 2 billion people online around the world. In the US alone, more than 220 million people use the Internet. Within Africa, one person out of every 10 is estimated to be an Internet user (up from one in 5,000 back in 1998), making the continent the region in the world with the lowest penetration rate.

Among the many reasons for this poor showing are the scarcity and prohibitive costs of broadband connections (the fastest means of accessing the Internet), and the limited number of personal computers in use.

But these challenges simultaneously contribute to Africa's impressive growth rate in the use of mobile Internet, which in recent years has been the highest in the world. "Triple-digit growth rates are routine across the continent," notes Jon von Tetzchner, co-founder of Opera, the world's most popular Internet browser for mobile phones. "The widespread availability of mobile phones means that the mobile Web can reach tens of millions more than the wired Web." Mr. Tetzchner believes that like mobile phones, whose use has grown rapidly in Africa in recent years, the "mobile Web is beginning to reshape the economic, political and social development of the continent."

2.6 Freedom of Social Media

Press freedom is crucial for development to take place. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: *"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers"*

UNESCO, as the only UN body in Kenya with the specific mandate to defend freedom of expression, has supported among other efforts to understand the impact of media freedom. The study undertaken by the centre for peace and human security (CPHS) confirm that press freedom is important for development. Focus here is on poverty, governance, peace, among other areas. These encouraging findings furthermore collaborate the assertion that a widespread media access and freedom contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Besides the efforts made by UNESCO, some other NGOs use other criteria to judge the level of press freedom in Kenya. They include; *Reporters Without Borders*, *The Freedom House* among others.

According to *Reporters Without Borders*, more than a third of the world's people live in countries where there is no press freedom. Overwhelmingly, these people live in countries where there is no system of democracy or where there are serious deficiencies in the democratic process. To this end, most non-democratic societies employ state-run news organizations to promote the propaganda critical to maintaining an existing political power base and suppress (often very brutally, through the use of police, military, or intelligence agencies) any significant attempts by the media or individual journalists to challenge the approved "government line" on contentious issues. This can range from simple threats to their professional careers (firing, professional blacklisting) to death threats, kidnapping, torture, and assassination. It is reported that, in 2003, 42 journalists lost their lives pursuing their profession and that, in the same year; at least 130 journalists were in prison as a result of their occupational activities. In 2005, 63 journalists and 5 media assistants were killed worldwide. Kenyan journalists and bloggers enjoy moderate level of freedom. There is a recommendable degree of freedom of expression compared with countries like Myanmar (Burma), Jammu & Kashmir, India, Papua, Indonesia, Waziristan, Pakistan, Tibet, People's Republic of China and Niger where freedom of expression is limited.

3.0 Summary of Discussions

In summary, media can be said to play a very critical role in national and even regional development. The fact that it is considered a fourth pillar in a country to some extent holds.

There are three closing comments as a result of this research effort. First, the use of social media and networking can conform to and even complement the principles of the Community Development Society. The use of these tools has the potential to promote the fundamental tenets of the Society and influence how practitioners act and interact in the future.

Second, social media and networking, while having challenges, can if the many previously described obstacles and challenges are overcome, also provide a relatively simple, free, and ubiquitous method of communicating, sharing of information, and involvement of a diverse constituency in community development efforts. Continued work in this area must progress to ensure these tools remain easy to use and understandable to practitioners, particularly with current threat to net-neutrality looming.

Last, the use of these tools has great potential to transform the community development discipline in ways that are likely unanticipated. Those involved in community development would do well to become familiar with various opportunities, to address the challenges outlined above in a coordinated effort, and seek new and innovative methods to use and apply social media and networking tools to transform the discipline in the future.

4.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions above, the researcher proffered these recommendations which when implemented, will help other communities in igniting the fire of development through community self-help, other than waiting endlessly for the intervention of the government. Communities desirous of development in Kenya should embark on self-help efforts. The best way to mobilize them for community development is through social media networks and applications.

Social media activities should not be viewed in isolation from other areas of democracy, governance, economic, social and environmental programs and understood to only be important in civil society programming. In fact, greater impact may be achieved by integrating social media support into other additional areas like the rule of law. This indirect approach may prove extremely beneficial in environments where outright social media support activities might be impossible.

There is a need for Kenyan government to support programs to strengthen the civil society organizations dedicated to advocating around social media issues, such as the social media law and policy institutes. Where these organizations are unable to access local funding, external support may be needed to strengthen their capacity and enable them to achieve long-term financial sustainability for example funding from NGOs like USAID can be sought.

Another overlooked area of social media assistance is that of public service broadcast.

Social media law reform is a priority area since it addresses the structural and institutional constraints to social media development. It is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition in order to create a social media that will support national development.

Challenges to media sector development are great and some such as hostile political regimes, and restrictive economic environments may prove beyond the scope of any assistance.

There is no substitute, however, for creativity and flexibility at the field level, and innovations in designing and implementing media activities should be encouraged. It is also important to continue and to improve coordination of Kenyan media social sector activities with other countries in the global arena.

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