

## Social Media adoption as alternative platforms for political marketing in Kenya

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### **Abstract**

*This study seeks to establish the determinants of social media adoption for political marketing in Kenya. The study is guided by the diffusion of innovations theory. The study utilizes the mixed methods sequential explanatory design. Politicians who contested at the presidential, gubernatorial, senatorial, women representative and parliamentary levels in the 2013 general elections in Kenya comprise the study population. The Fisher's Formula for finite population drew a sample size of 338 respondents from a total population of 2807 political candidates. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation from politicians across the national and devolved levels. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview guides. The quantitative data obtained from the administration of questionnaires was analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to answer the quantitative research questions. Qualitative data obtained from interviews with key informants was transcribed and divided into meaningful analytical units which were coded for content analysis. Findings show that there was a rapid adoption of social media among the candidates for the 2013 General Elections with Facebook diffusing more rapidly than Twitter. Relatively cheaper cost of social media use, familiarity with technology, and years of Internet use, were shown to significantly contribute to adoption decision. Though mobilization of voters may primarily be done offline, social media ought to be utilized together with other media to supplement campaigns in complementarity and mutual dependency, as the study demonstrates a situation in flux.*

**Keywords:** *Social media, diffusion of innovations, technology adoption, political marketing, political campaigns*

## **Introduction**

Conventional forms of campaigning employed by politicians in Kenya since independence have largely taken the form of rallies and speeches, advertising, and spending by contenders on direct gifts of various kinds to the electorate. These methods have had huge cost implications for Kenya (Kimani&Mungai, 2012; Maina, 2013; Stiftung, 2010) and have largely achieved negative results such as entrenching ethnicity, and stifling the democratic culture (Ochieng, 2008; International Crisis Group, 2013).

The use of online media as a means of political communication is not new in Kenya, having been used in the December 2007 elections (Odinga, 2013). In the preceding election in 2002, the major political parties and some individual politicians had an online presence too. The entrance of new ICT forms and social media in particular, has affected the mode of political campaigns in Kenya. New ICTs have been seen to play a role in the Kenyan elections both on the side of campaigners and voters. One of the notable roles is political marketing which particularly stands in contrast to the role that ICT is identified with in contributing to the violence in the 2007-2008 election crises (Goldstein & Rotich 2008). The 2013 elections campaigns saw the widespread use of ICTs, social media tools, and innovative crowd-sourcing platforms by citizens and politicians alike to disseminate information (Freedom House, 2013). During the 2013 elections, some parties or political candidates stressed downward dissemination of information via new media whilst others emphasised their interactive and targeting possibilities.

The adoption of social media for political marketing is interrogated against a backdrop of constitutional change in Kenya. The Constitution of Kenya 2010, which hinges on a devolved system of governance, necessitated the creation of new political offices especially at the county level. These include the office of governor, senator, women representative, and county assembly ward representatives. Candidates for these new offices went to the polls for the first time in 2013, and, as yet, factors that influenced their choice of media for political marketing are relatively unknown.

Literature suggests that social media creates communicative spaces that enables a greater democratic culture to flourish (Evans-Cowley& Hollander, 2010; Hyden & Leslie, 2002; Scammell, 1995). Apart from improving the quantity and quality of information flow from the

electorate to parties and candidates, social media potentially improves the channels of communication from politicians to the electorate (Scammell, 1995).

New ICT's have been seen to offer political actors European and American democracies direct contact with citizens and thereby an advantage over existing or traditional media (Römmele, 2003). Although a similar advantage may be manifest in the use of social media for political engagement in the Global South, the fractured nature of the Kenyan electorate may impinge on the adoption of social media for political marketing.

Whereas there is considerable research on social media use for political communication and elections in Europe and the U.S. (Hong & Nadler, 2011; O'Conner et al., 2010; Vergeer et al., 2011), as yet little research has explored the adoption of social media by politicians in the Global South and specifically in Kenyan elections, and more so with the creation of new political offices. Therefore, there is need for scholarly analysis and investigation into the determinants of social media adoption for political marketing in Kenya.

## **Theoretical Review**

The study is guided by the diffusion of innovations theory and the social marketing theory. The diffusion of innovations theory developed by Everett Rogers (1995) seeks to explain conditions of uptake of technology by a population. Diffusion is the process by which a technology is adopted and gains acceptance by members of a certain community (Rogers, 1995). Adoption decisions are thought to depend on (i) characteristics of the technology, (ii) characteristics of the adopter and (iii) characteristics of the environment.

Characteristics of the technology relevant to its adoption are relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. Characteristics of an adopter are identified as financial security, opinion leadership, age, personal confidence, level of information, and attitude. Thirdly, adoption decisions are thought to also depend on characteristics of the environment (Rogers, 2003). According to Foot and Schneider (2006) the political environment, which formed the basis of this study, included the members of a particular community, their level of income, level of office, competitiveness of the race, and party affiliation.

Social media are considered the new technology which politicians adopt at varying degrees. The study sought to ascertain which factors are at play, and to what extent they influence a politicians' decision to use social media.

The study was also guided by the social marketing theory. This theory “assumes the existence of an information provider who seeks to bring about widespread, long-lasting, positive change (Andreasen, 2006). In the context of this study, the change is in political leadership and by extension policy change. According to Baran and Davis (2009) social marketing includes methods for inducing audience awareness of campaign topics or candidates during elections. The theory provides a framework for designing, carrying out, and evaluating political campaigns.

Baran and Davis (2009) observe that social marketing theory recognizes the existence of the media, and affords it a role as a conduit through which politicians communicate to the electorate. They further posit that the media are effectively assumed to be tools at the disposal of politicians. Media include both mainstream media like the Television and Radio as well as new media channels such as the Internet and the World Wide Web. In this sense then, the theory provides a framework within which to interrogate the role of social media as online campaign platforms that political candidates can utilize.

## **Methodology**

The study utilised the mixed methods sequential explanatory design, which consisted of the quantitative phase followed by the qualitative phase. This design enabled the researcher to collect and analyse quantitative data on the degree to which the independent variables, namely demographic characteristics, technological factors, representation level affected the adoption of social media for political marketing. Qualitative data from interviews with select politicians and their chief campaign officers on their engagement with social media for political marketing were collected and analysed second in sequence so that the analysis helped explain, and elaborate on the quantitative results obtained.

Politicians who contested at the presidential, gubernatorial, senatorial, women representative and parliamentary levels in the 2013 general elections in Kenya comprised the study population. The Fisher's Formula for finite population drew a sample size of 338 respondents from a total population of 2807 political candidates who participated in the

quantitative phase. Stratified random sampling was used to get representation from politicians across the different levels. The sample comprised of candidates from the presidential (n=8), gubernatorial (n=28), senatorial (n=32), women representatives (n=36), parliamentary (n=234) levels. For the qualitative phase of the study, the researcher drew a purposeful sample of 20 respondents who were considered information rich across the levels.

Key informants were used to gain access to politicians. In the first phase of the study, the researcher administered the questionnaire with the help of research assistants. In the second phase, the researcher collected qualitative data using the interview guide on a purposefully selected sample of political candidates and their chief campaign officers. Documentation of the interview was done in written form using the note-taking technique, as well as in audio form using a tape recorder.

## **Results**

### **Use of Social Media**

A majority of politicians used social media during their election campaign in the 2013 general elections. The adoption of social media increased from being extremely sporadic in the 2007 elections, to 87.3% usage among all candidates in the 2013 elections as shown in Figure B1. To achieve this level of adoption within a five year period is quite remarkable and acts as a marker of the speed of development. This is a pointer to a paradigm shift in the ways in which politicians market their candidature in the context of general elections.

Results in Table A1 indicate that a majority of the candidates across the electoral levels adopted Facebook more than Twitter. For example 100% of presidential candidates used Facebook followed by parliamentary candidates at 95.6%. The results indicate that there was a significance difference ( $P < 0.05$ ) between the type of social media used. Facebook was used more (91.3%) compared to twitter across all the political offices.

### **Influence of demographic factors on social media adoption**

Among the demographic factors, gender is shown to be irrelevant as a determinant of adoption in the context of elections. Results in Table A2 shows that among male candidates, 88.2% of them used social media, while 86.1% of female candidates utilized the media.

These high levels of usage posted indicate that the gender divide in technology adoption was diminishing.

However candidates' age, education and political party size appeared to influence adoption of social media. Politicians who were younger in age used social media more than older politicians. Analysis in Table A3 shows that 93.5% of politicians aged 35 years and below used social media, while 89% of those aged between 36-50 used the media. Only 83% of those aged 51 and above used social media.

Candidates who were better educated had relatively higher adoption rates at the gubernatorial and parliamentary levels. Results in Table A4 indicate that at the parliamentary level for instance, 100% of candidates with doctoral degrees used social media while those with diplomas posted a low of 73.9%. These findings are in line with diffusion of innovation literature that state that higher levels of education contribute to greater technology adoption rates. Education makes people more comfortable with, and skilled in the use of technology.

Regarding political party size, adoption rates for candidates from major political parties were marginally higher than those from smaller parties especially at the women representative and parliamentary levels. For example data in Table A5 indicates that at parliamentary level, candidates sponsored by ODM which was a major party posted 92.7% adoption rate while those from UDF, a smaller party, posted a low of 77.8%.

### **Influence of technological factors on social media adoption**

Experience of using technology affected adoption rates. Candidates who had more than three years Internet experience were more likely to use social media than those who had fewer years of Internet experience. Results obtained from the Chi-Square test as shown in Table A6 were ( $X^2=49.194$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $Sig =0.000$ ), indicating that the variation between years of Internet experience and social media use was significant. Further, the result show that 89.8% of candidates with more than ten years' Internet experience used social media, 92.5% of candidates with three to ten years' Internet experience used social media and 83.7% of candidates with less than three years' Internet experience used social media. Finally 33.3% of candidates with no experience with Internet used social media.

Results in Figure B2 show financial consideration having the most influence (69.1%), followed by familiarity with technology (50.8%) and level of competition (49.2%). Level of office had the least influence (37.7%). Other campaigns were drawn by low cost of using social media. Interviews with the candidates confirmed these findings. A parliamentary candidate stated: “The biggest benefit of Facebook is that it is free. It is one of the cheapest ways to connect with voters.” Therefore the cost of advertising was the major determiner of choice of media.

Results shown in Figure B3 indicate that 83% of respondents felt that adequate access to the Internet contributes to successful political marketing using social media, 81% felt that having personnel managing a politician's social media site is important, and 80% felt that owning a personal computer connected to the Internet is important to a politician for accessing social media. Other views were expressed as follows: Social media are easy to use (77%), having a social media site makes it easier to communicate with voters (77%), Being competent working online contributes to a politician’s successful use of social media for political marketing (75%). From our interviews with political candidates and staff on their social media campaign teams, we found that most of them were concerned with slow Internet speeds. They found it challenging to post photos and videos of their campaign activities. In an interview, one presidential candidate stated: “It is important to have someone who posts messages on social media as I deliver my speech. I cannot give a speech and tweet at the same time.” This point out the need to have staff on the social media campaign team.

### **Constituency characteristics and social media adoption**

Data obtained in Figure B4 indicated that 88% of candidates consider the average age of constituents as influencing their adoption decisions, followed by literacy levels of constituents (84%), and income levels (71%). Constituency factors that ranked lower as determinants of adoption were the level of office and the expectations of constituents both at 64%. This view was supported by political candidates and staff on their social media campaign teams. For instance one presidential campaign staff observed:

“For campaign information on youth empowerment, or youth mobilizing and employment, we used social media. They are constantly on social media, alerts keep

popping up on their devices. But if the piece of information didn't concern the youth, we avoided social media because the impact wouldn't be much.”

We can therefore infer that political candidates tailor their online campaigns to the characteristics of their constituents, particularly voters' age and literacy levels and income levels. Therefore, constituency characteristics have a great impact on online campaigns.

## **Conclusions**

The study established that social media have created a new platform for political marketing. Social media have provided an easily accessible medium for politicians to distribute political information. Candidates and campaign strategists have recognized this potential and therefore utilize these platforms in the campaign process. Use of social media increased from being extremely sporadic in the 2007 elections, to 87.3% usage among all candidates in the 2013 elections. Diffusion of innovation literature provides some insights into the reasons for the steeper trajectory in social media adoption. Candidates' characteristics such as age and education affected adoption rates. Higher education levels in among the crop of candidates particularly accounted for the steep adoption. Diffusion of innovation theory supports the observation that higher levels of education make people more comfortable with, and skilled in the use of technology. To achieve this level of adoption within a five year period is quite remarkable for a developing nation with a maturing democracy. This indeed shows that there is a paradigm shift in the ways in which politicians express themselves in the political realm ever since the emergence of new media.

Most politicians reported incurring low costs when they used social media for political marketing. Since the cost of updating profiles and posting content is extremely low, most politicians see the Internet as a fundamental component of any communication and mobilization strategy. This advantage could lower the cost of entry into the political arena, given that the trend in Kenyan politics is to constantly create new political parties and alliances every election year. However, going forward, use of social media may simultaneously generate different expectations of political campaigns and new kinds of future costs.



Most candidates felt that having personal computers with high Internet speeds was an important determiner of successful political marketing online. The means that the Internet could be available but if the speeds are slow, then perhaps going online to view sites or post content especially photos and videos could pose a challenge. Most candidates found social media easy to use. The diffusion of innovations theory states that complexity of innovations is negatively correlated with the rate of adoption. Since a majority of politicians perceived social media as easy to use, this view could account for the higher usage incidence reported.

The results from this study give support to the thesis that constituency characteristics indeed influence social media adoption for political marketing. Characteristics such as level of electoral office, the politicians' perception of constituents' expectations regarding online campaign, the average age of constituents, and literacy levels of constituents, were found to influence social media adoption levels.

The diffusion of innovation literature served to inform our analysis and interpretation of our data on who adopts new campaign technologies and to what extent. This study identifies financial consideration, and familiarity with technology as the most influential factors in the choice of social media for political marketing. Kenya is still a middle transition state in terms of social media adoption and the use of the Internet in general. Internet connectivity, and the cost of gadgets used for internet access remain a big challenge among voters in the global south. There is need, therefore, to mobilize voters primarily offline, but to supplement it with on-line campaign effort in complementarity and mutual dependency.

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## Appendix A: Tables

**Table A1**

### Relationship between Election Office Vied For and Type of Social Media

	Electoral office (%)						Chi-Square test
	President (n=6)	Governor (n=21)	Senator (n=28)	Women Rep (n=27)	MP (n=183)	Whole Sample (n=262)	
Facebook	100.0	81.0	67.9	92.6	95.6	91.3	X <sup>2</sup> =21.034
Twitter	.0	9.5	17.9	.0	4.4	5.7	df = 8
Website	.0	9.5	14.3	7.4	.0	3.0	Sig = .007*

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

**Table A2**

### Distribution of Politicians' Gender and Social Media Adoption

	Gender (%)		Chi-Square test
	Male (n=229)	Female (n=72)	
Use of social media in 2013 campaign	Yes	88.2	X <sup>2</sup> = 0.224
	No	11.8	df = 1 Sig = 0.385*

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

**Table A3**

### Distribution of Politicians' Age and Social Media Adoption

Electoral office (%)		Age				Chi-Square test
		Below 20 years	21 – 35 years	36 - 50 years	51 years and above	
President (n=6)	Yes	.0	.0	100.0	100.0	a
	No	.0	.0	.0	.0	
Governor (n=23)	Yes	.0	100.0	88.9	88.9	X <sup>2</sup> = .661
	No	.0	.0	11.1	11.1	df = 2 Sig = .719*
Senator (n=29)	Yes	100.0	83.3	86.7	85.7	X <sup>2</sup> = .194
	No	.0	16.7	13.3	14.3	df = 3 Sig = .978*
Women Rep (n=33)	Yes	.0	71.4	94.4	71.4	X <sup>2</sup> = 6.866
	No	100.0	28.6	5.6	28.6	df = 3 Sig = .076*
MP (n=205)	Yes	.0	93.3	86.3	86.0	X <sup>2</sup> = 1.010

No	.0	6.7	13.7	14.0	df = 2 Sig = .604*
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<sup>a</sup>. No statistics are computed because the variable is a constant.

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

<sup>a</sup>. No statistics are computed because the variable is a constant.

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

**Table A4**  
**Distribution of Politicians by Education and Social Media Adoption**

Electoral office (%)	Level of education				Chi-Square test	
	Diploma	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctorate		
President (n=6)	Yes	-	100.0	-	-	a
	No	-	-	-	-	
Governor (n=25)	Yes	-	88.2	100.0	100.0	X <sup>2</sup> = .839 df = 2 Sig = .657*
	No	-	11.8	.0	.0	
Senator (n=31)	Yes	100.0	76.5	85.7	100.0	X <sup>2</sup> = 1.805 df = 3 Sig = .614*
	No	.0	23.5	14.3	.0	
Women Rep (n=33)	Yes	72.7	93.3	71.4	-	X <sup>2</sup> = 2.012 df = 2 Sig = .366*
	No	27.3	6.7	28.6	-	
MP (n=197)	Yes	73.9	94.5	82.4	100.0%	X <sup>2</sup> = 7.438 df = 3 Sig = .059*
	No	26.1	5.5	17.6	.0%	

<sup>a</sup>. No statistics are computed because the variable is a constant

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

**Table A5**  
**Distribution of Politicians' Party and Social Media Adoption**

Electoral office (%)	office	Party affiliation					Chi-Square test
		The National Alliance Party (TNA)	Orange Democratic Party (ODM)	United Democratic Forum (UDF)	United Republican Party (URP)	Other specify	
President (n=6)	Yes	100.0	100.0	100.0	.0	100.0	a
Governor (n=24)	Yes	100.0	100.0	66.7	100.0	88.9	X <sup>2</sup> = 2.400 df = 2
	No	.0	.0	33.3	.0	11.1	

							Sig = .301*
Senator (n=29)	Yes	50.0	100.0	100.0	83.3	85.7	X <sup>2</sup> = 9.436 df = 3 Sig = .024*
	No	50.0	.0	.0	16.7	14.3	
Women Rep (n=34)	Yes	100.0	87.5	80.0	80.0	70.0	X <sup>2</sup> = 1.306 df = 2 Sig = .520*
	No	.0	12.5	20.0	20.0	30.0	
MP (n=206)	Yes	90.5	92.7	77.8	91.7	80.6	X <sup>2</sup> = 2.514 df = 3 Sig = .473*
	No	9.5	7.3	22.2	8.3	19.4	

<sup>a</sup>. No statistics are computed because the variable is a constant

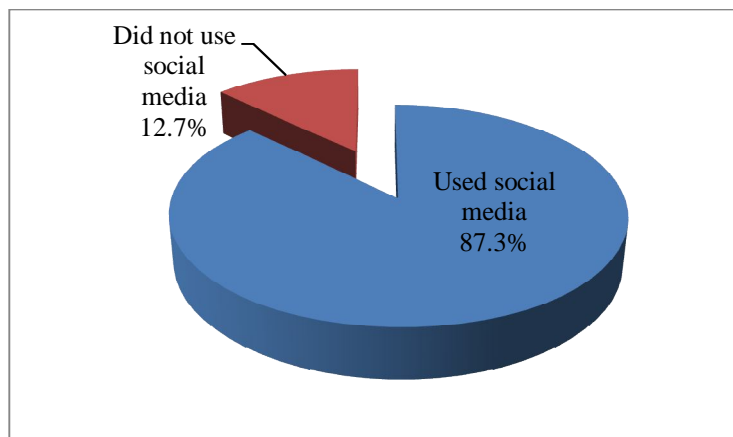
\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

**Table 6**  
**Years of Internet Experience and Social media adoption**

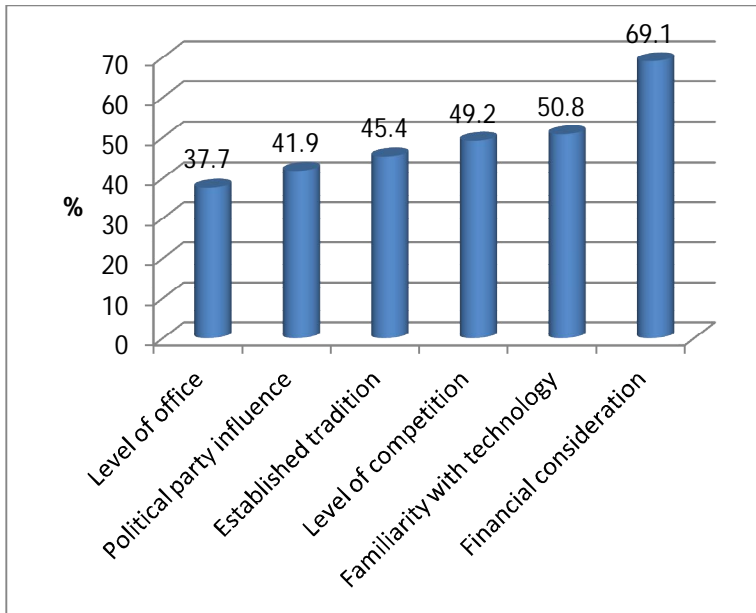
Years of Internet experience	Social media adoption (%)		Chi-Square test
	Yes	No	
No experience	33.3	66.7	X <sup>2</sup> =49.194 df=3 Sig =0.000*
Less than 3 years	83.7	16.3	
3-10 years	92.5	7.5	
More than 10 years	89.8	10.2	

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

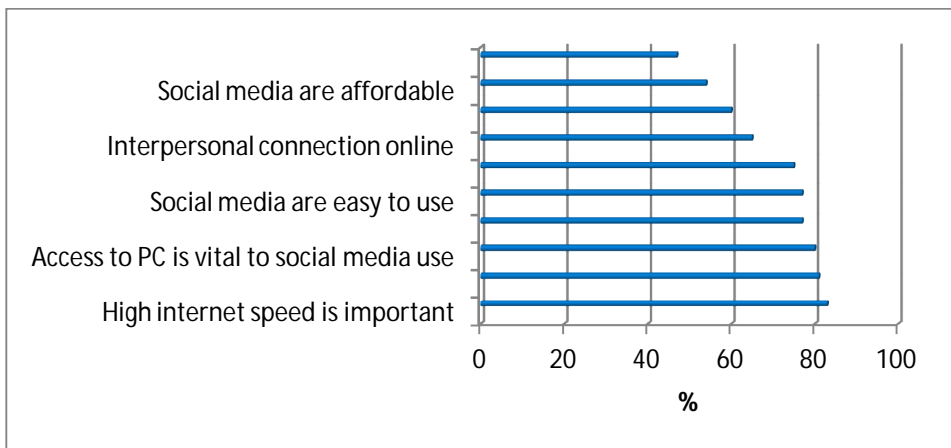
## Appendix B: Figures



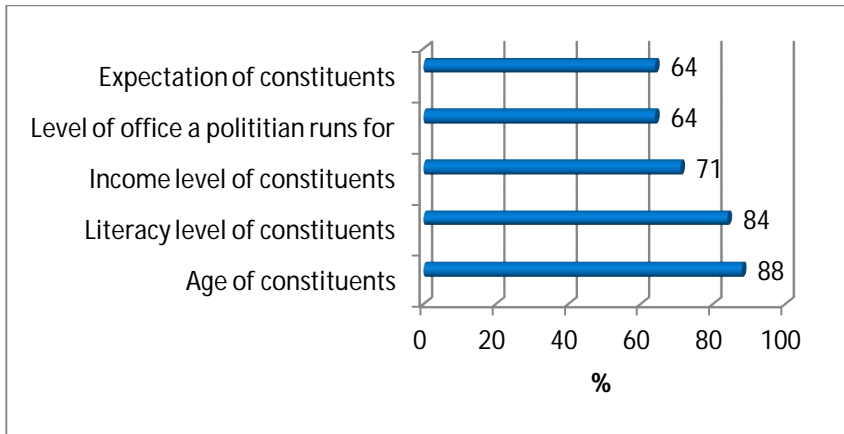
**Figure B1: Politicians' Adoption of Social Media**



**Figure B2: Factors Influencing the Choice of Social Media**



**Figure B3: Influence of Technological Factors on the Adoption of Social Media**



**Figure B4: Constituency characteristics and Adoption Social Media**