

The Impact of Social Media on Public Communication by Government Ministries in Kenya

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Abstract

This study sought to investigate government ministries' use of social media in disseminating public information. The specific objective for the research was to examine the levels of engagement that government ministries' social media managers exhibit on social media sites and its influence on citizen engagement. The mixed method approach of data collection and analysis was utilized in the study. The research design adopted was a descriptive survey. It targeted the managers of government ministries' social media pages and the conversations on social media for respective government ministries in Kenya. Content analysis focused on the conversations that were undertaken online in 2015 on Facebook and Twitter for the Respective Ministries. A sample of 4 ministries was selected from the population of 13 ministries with Facebook and Twitter accounts. The data was collected through structured interviews and content analysis of conversations that were held online on the Social media pages. The findings indicate that the government ministries adopted social media in communicating with the members of the public and have accommodated the use of social media as one of the modes of communication in their communication strategies, this has helped in direct communication with members of the public. The study recommends that ministries critically look at the feedback on social media and engage the public more so that the public can participate directly in making decisions that affect them. There is still no mechanism of incorporating feedback from social media in policy making at ministerial level, this means that the communication strategies of the ministries should be explicit in terms of how the feedback will be incorporated in decision making and policy formulation in order to enhance citizen engagement and public participation.

Key Terminologies: Social Media, Government Ministries, Public Communication

Introduction

Successful communication between citizens and government is critical for the effective implementation of governance. This is because, effective citizen engagement, civic education and citizen participation allows citizens to take part in decision making and contribute directly in policies that affect them. The citizen is more empowered and aware of all legislations that affect him/her through constant engagement with the government. This communication between the government and the public needs to be two way in nature for it to be complete and effective.

Social media can enhance corporate governance in the governance of a country by helping build open communication between governments and publics. Nations across the Americas, Asia, and Europe have all claimed successes in reducing corruption through e-government (Bhatnagar, 2003; Shim & Eom, 2008) as cited by Bertot, Jaeger & Grimes 2010. This is because they have embraced communication in an internet enabled environment. Kenya's central government ministries uptake on the use of social media and the general communication in an internet enabled environment is still low despite the constitutional requirements.

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 specifically in Article 10 provides for public participation at all levels of governance, which involves proper consultation and two way engagement between the government and the members of the public. Article 174 addresses the aspect of participation by the members of the public and participation on decisions on matters that affect them. Despite the Kenyan constitution providing for public participation in Kenya, the level of citizen involvement by government especially through social media has been poor.

The Government of Kenya has barely begun to proactively experiment with direct, individual communication with citizens through social media. The communication has mostly been one sided and mainly through traditional media (Newspapers, radio and Television) of communication (Heinze, Schneider & Feriém, 2013). These traditional media do not provide avenues for direct and immediate feedback in the dissemination of information from the government to the members of the public. However, successful two way communication between citizens and government is critical to the effective implementation of governance in a democracy. (Wang & Wart, 2007; Meijer & Thaens, 2009; Chun *et al.*, 2010).

It is against this backdrop that the study therefore sought to examine adoption of social media by government ministries for citizen engagement in public communication in Kenya.

Types of Social media

Social media refers to a set of online tools open for public membership that support idea sharing, creating and editing content, and building relationships through interaction and collaboration (Mount & Martinez, 2014). Social media are the collection of digital channels and tools (for example, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) used for public communication.

Facebook

Facebook is a social networking which has since moved from the personal to the public sphere since 2004. Facebook is increasingly being used as an avenue for citizen engagement in public communication globally. The ministries create a facebook page in their name then after assuming control of their profile, managers of this accounts could initiate a discussion topic, post comments on their wall, and post notes, event information, videos and photographs. Facebook users who 'friended' the ministries as a way to access information posted, would view it on their own profile or could also post materials and comments. The ministries pages offer greater capability to post various kinds of material (for example announcements, links to other pages, YouTube links, notes, photo albums, and event information) and allow their followers to post their own materials.

Twitter

Since its launch as a social news platform in July 2006, twitter has grown as a real-time social media tool that allows people to find and share information on what is happening worldwide (Chang, 2010). Twitter defines its service as a real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, idea, opinions and news (Twitter, 2012). Twitter's micro-blogging and messaging functionality has become a powerful tool for interpersonal, professional and academic communication (Java et al., 2007; Dahlberg (2001).

Benefits of government ministries' use of social media

Government and public communication needs to be dialogic in nature for it to be effective (Mergel, 2014). Dialogical communication between government and citizens may also help to close gaps related to understanding, participating, and involvement, to name a few (Heinze, *et al* 2013). New media of technology play a big role in public communication (Matthew& Marian, (2014).

Social media have generally transformed public communication and the way the government ministries communicate. The new media environment has changed how business is done as well as how politicians reach out to the electorates (Kakachia, Patarai&Cecire, (2012). This has raised the bar in communication in the sense that, the public expects to gain information more easily and faster from the government through the various platforms they use. Social media engagement is important in governance as noted by Mergel (2014).

Heldman, Schindelar and Weaver (2013) discuss the following benefits of social media. First, Social media works best when integrated with the traditional communication channels. This is because the other traditional media of communication also record some degree of success in reaching out to the public.

Secondly, through social media, it is possible to target and reach diverse audience categories. The user and gratifications approach to communication postulates that people have different motivations for using the media they use. Some audiences prefer to use social media while others prefer the traditional forms. The number of social media users is steadily growing; this means that it has created an opportunity to reach audiences who may prefer to communicate with the government through those channels.

Thirdly, social media also allow the sharing of public information in new spaces created through technology. They allow communicators to engage in the new channels. People are able to share relevant content in new and emerging channels, test how their messages resonate in different spaces, and provide opportunities for multiple exposures to messages.

Fourthly, Social media also allows the communicators to listen and collect feedback in real time. This is an advantage because it is easy to monitor conversations as they occur in real time. Social media can be used to scan publicly available content to inform communication activities. Through this, the government is able to get the feedback from people on their leadership, identify the information gaps that they need to fill, and then adjust their messages accordingly.

Finally, through social media, direct engagement is increased among the participants of communication. This is because of the multi-way interactive functionality that is inherent in social media. If well used, social media can increase direct engagement to maintain and increase trust and credibility between the government and the people. This is in a bid towards good corporate governance.

Government ministries' social media adoption and citizen engagement

Government communications in specific contexts have been studied in the past literature. However, most of this literature examines government communications in Western democracies. The United States Federal government agencies and departments have adopted social media technologies. Most of these are driven by President Obama's Transparency and open government memo that aims at departments using social media pro-actively in serving the citizens. This is meant to ensure that government communication gets to citizens where they are and whenever they need it Mergel, (2012).

Bertot, Jaeger & Grimes (2010) discuss the impact of policies on government social media usage, consider that employment of social media by governments will ensure that they access certain opportunities for instance democratic participation and engagement, coproduction of services and delivery between governments and publics as well as crowdsourcing solutions and innovations through public knowledge and talent.

Despite the government slowly waking up to the reality of social media and its use as a source of information for the publics, it has not been proactive in the use of the media for public communication as much as the other traditional media of communication (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes 2010).

Many Kenyans expect that the government services and information can be available electronically and that government agencies will be accessible via social media technologies. This study will fill in the gap by providing the evidence on the gap between the expectations of the public vis a vis the reality on the use of social media by government. This is with the aim of portraying how government ministries currently use social media for public communication. The study will also provide the government with insights on how best to use social media to reach the publics and the skills necessary for effective two way engagement and social media management by the communication officers in government ministries. they are perceived by the public and how they can improve or sustain a positive image to the publics.

Research Design

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. A sample of conversations were selected and studied in detail as well as interviews of the communication officers sampled for the study. The survey consisted of social media pages owned by the government ministries. The scope of the study included Facebook and Twitter which are the most popularly used forms of social media around the world and in Kenya particularly (Simon *et al*, 2014).

Population of the study

The population included conversations on Facebook and Twitter accounts for respective government ministries in Kenya and the communication officers who manage the government ministries Facebook and Twitter accounts as the gatekeepers. The national government of Kenya is made up of 21 Ministries. From the survey, only 13 ministries had active Facebook and Twitter pages by 2015. The study involved the 13 ministries who have Twitter and Facebook accounts. It also involved the population of 32609 conversations that are were recorded on the government ministries social media pages of Facebook and 11,122 tweets posted on the Twitter accounts.

Sample and the sampling techniques

This study used data from the 4 government ministries. Two ministries were selected from the most active ministries and the remaining two were from the least active ministries as exhibited on the activities of their social media pages. The sample also involved 16 communication officers of the ministries selected using simple random selection method from each ministry. The sample also included 251 conversations from Facebook and Twitter conversations. Data was collected through interview guides and content analysis of the conversations sampled.

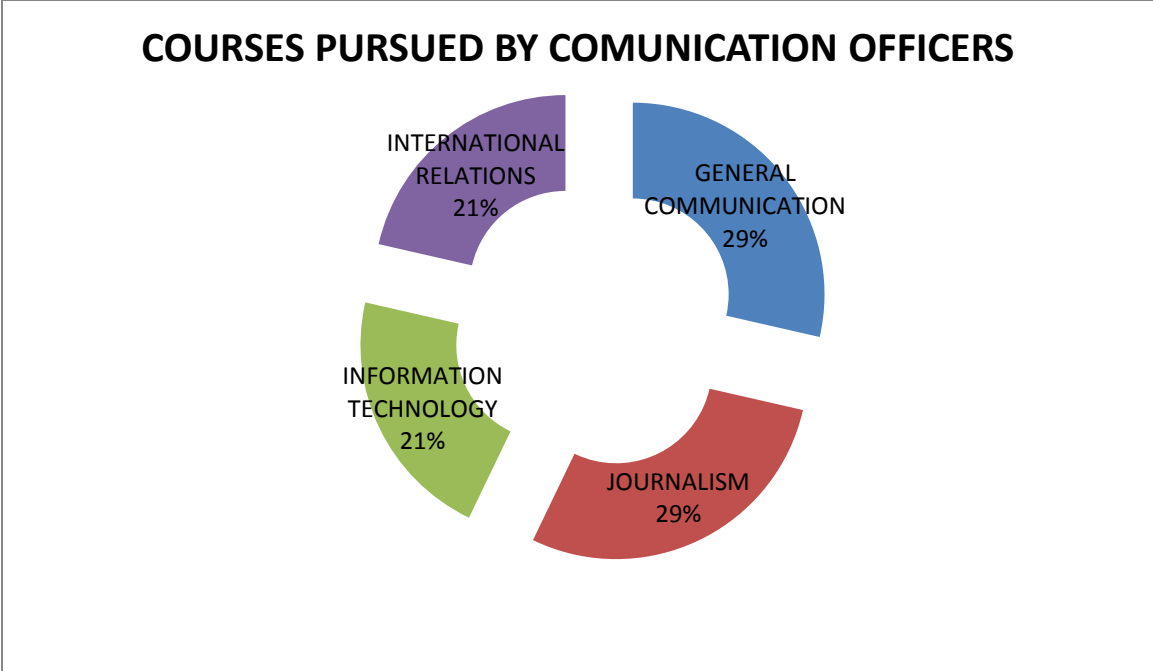
Key Findings

Educational level of respondents

The researcher sought to establish the education level of the respondents. This was mainly to ascertain the required level of education for a communication officer. The results indicated that there were 75% of the respondents' with a bachelor's degree and 25% of the respondents had acquired post graduate qualifications in various fields of study. All the respondents had attained at least an undergraduate degree in their various courses that they pursued.

Course Pursued

The researcher sought to find out the courses that had been pursued by the communication officers. The study found out from the respondents that 29% of the communication officers had studied courses in General Communication, 29% of the communication officers had studied courses in Journalism, 21% of the communication officers had studied courses in information Technology and 21% of the communication officers had studied courses in international relations. This is illustrated in the figure below.



The findings indicate that the ministries consider training in communication and information technology as crucial for a social media manager. Three ministries had personnel sourced from these areas of expertise except in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International trade where the social media managers were primarily trained in international relations and diplomacy studies. The social media accounts for that specific ministry were run and managed mostly by interns absorbed into the ministry.

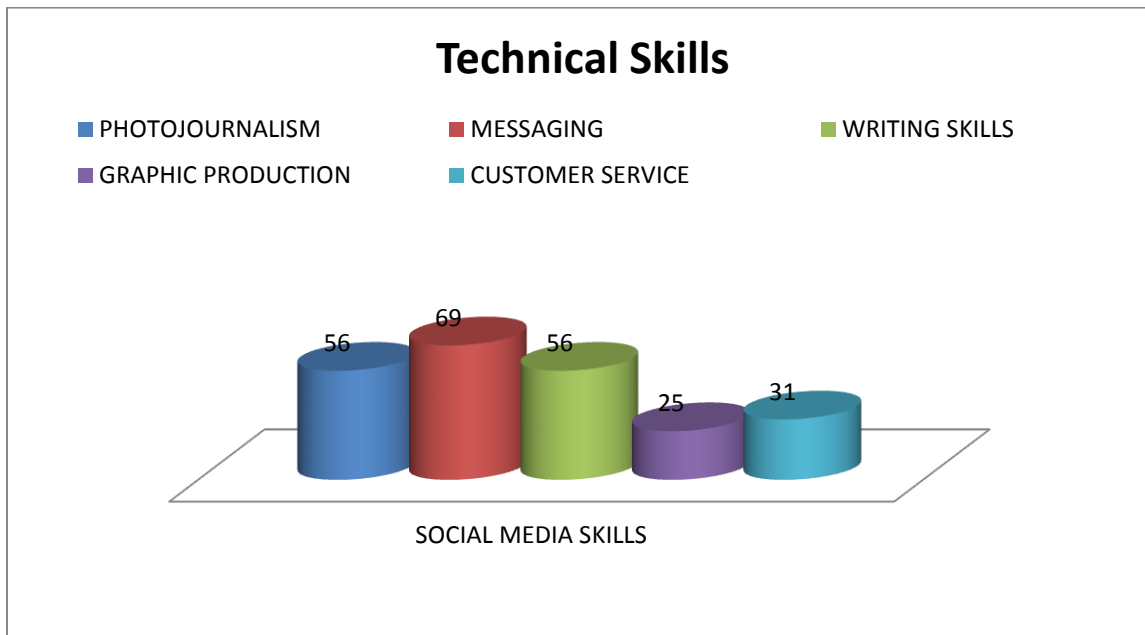
Technical Skills in Social Media Management

The study indicated that majority of the respondents had technical skills in social media management. The technical skills included; Photography, Messaging/Texting, Journalistic skills, Captioning of stories, Internet connectivity and Website management. The findings indicated that from the interviewees, 71% had the technical skills for social media management while 29% were learning on the job on how to better their skills in social media management for government ministries.

Key Area of Expertise in Social Media Management

The study sought to establish the respondents' key area of expertise in social media. This is because expertise in social media use is important in ensuring effective communication and citizen engagement through social media. 56% of the respondents had skills in photojournalism, 69% of the respondents had training in effective messaging using social media, 56% had skills in effective writing, 25% had skills in graphic production and 31% had skills in customer service.

This is illustrated below:



Graphic production and customer care skills had the least percentages in response with regard to social media use and management among the communication officers.

The need for specialized training on the use of social media

From the findings, 29% of the officers felt that they needed to learn on the job on how to better communicate with citizens. This was not felt to be a difficult task that required specialized training for the officers. A majority (72%) of the officers reported that specialized training is required for efficient and competitive use of social media by the government ministries for citizen engagement. This is because the government had adopted social media as one of its main forms of disseminating information to the public. This required the officers to be equipped with skills appropriate for using social media formally in the ministries.

The recommended skills included skills for mobilizing stakeholders on social media especially those in far off areas who could not access the offices physically and were in need of urgent information.

The officers felt that they needed to be equipped with skills to enable them know how to disclose official information appropriately through Facebook and Twitter to the concerned stakeholders. In addition, the officers also felt that social media needed to be managed by specialists hired to specifically manage social media accounts of the government ministries and would be in a section entirely dedicated to that. The specialists needed to be people equipped with skills for strategic social media communications for public engagement.

The communication officers interviewed also responded that there was need for specialized training on general communication skills and ethical communication through the internet. This was because of the various dynamics and threats posed on information on the internet by hackers. The Officers also reported that they required specialized trainings in the effective use of social media to escalate issues up the organizational chart/ladder.

The findings also indicated that the communication officers needed skills on how to put content on the social media that would not be deemed confrontational by the public. This required appropriate writing skills for the officers. The bloggers and other social media managers need to be trained professionals who had pursued communication in their training and practiced it in their careers. These officers also needed to be enthusiasts in the use of social media for citizen engagement.

Challenges faced when using social media

Firstly, the respondents reported that they had to undergo a lot of consultation before a posting on Facebook or Twitter thus resulting to a longer time before responding to the questions by the public. This was mainly due to government bureaucracy and the person tasked with giving official information from the ministry. This greatly affected the two way interaction and frequency of posting information on social media.

Secondly, challenge reported was that some of the ministries lacked social media equipment for use in citizen engagement. The respondents therefore ended up using personal gadgets when uploading information on social media sites. These limited the kind of information they could post especially the use of video and audio messages which require sophisticated features for the message to be well recorded and disseminated.

Thirdly, the study indicated that there was lack of training in social media management which made it difficult for the communication officers to use the social media appropriately. Even though 58% of the respondents interviewed had studied communication and journalism and had training in communication in an online environment; they had no specific training on the use of social media in public communication and citizen engagement.

Fourthly, issues with infrastructure at the ministry offices affected engagement through social media. The officers reported that internet connectivity in the office was a challenge in the use of social media in the government ministries. The Bandwidth was a problem in most of the ministries thus affecting the connectivity levels experienced. There was also the issue of high internet costs by the service provider affecting the connectivity and purchase of Wi-Fi bundles for use by the government ministries. The connection to wireless was expensive and the Local Area Network was sometimes unreliable. The cables in the office and the office infrastructure did not favour effective connectivity in the office because the cables were few and fixed only at specific points in the office. This greatly affected access to the internet.

Finally, The other challenge reported was the need for dedicated full time staff to run the social media pages. This was because the staff who were currently charged with the responsibility of engaging with the public through social media felt It was too much work for them. The comments were rapid, commenting and replying to each in real time was not possible. In some cases, the interns were the ones who were deployed to manage the social media pages on behalf of the officers; this definitely means that they could not appropriately tackle issues raised on social media due to their limited knowledge of the ministries where they were attached.

Their short stay at the ministries also meant that there was generally a lack of consistency on the management of the social media accounts. Interns would normally be engaged for a period of three months to a specific ministry after which they would leave.

Reasons for Adoption of Social Media for Public Communication

The Need to Constantly Update the Public

The respondents indicated that the ministries had a duty to constantly update the public on the events that the ministry was engaged in. This is in a bid to provide information in all forms as enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya. The ministry needed to better communicate with the public by constantly updating them. Facebook and Twitter allowed the ministries to do this. The officers were aware of the constitutional requirement for them to keep Kenyans informed through all forms of communication including social media of communication.

The wide audience reached

The second reason was on accessibility of the audience. The respondents interviewed also reported that they adopted social media so as to reach a wider audience stationed globally even the diaspora population that needed to engage with the government. Social media works on the internet platform which makes the world a global village. So long as person is connected to the Internet and is logged in to the respective social media, they will be able to access the government social media pages and interact with the managers of the account and other users on the page. For Instance one of the respondents replied that:

Through Facebook and Twitter, we as a ministry are able to reach a wide audience separated by space. We are able to share, follow and tag our posts to our followers on the social media pages.

Jubilee Coalition Government Manifesto

The use of social media in the government ministries was also due to the Government in place elected in 2012. The Jubilee Government sought to define itself as a digital government as per its campaign manifesto. Therefore, it was a mandatory directive from the Jubilee government that all government ministries should adopt social media as a modern way of communication. One respondent interviewed reported that:

You know the current government is a digital government and so we also have to become digital to function in this government effectively. We have to engage with the public online all the time using the social media and keep updating them on our activities as a ministry and those that touch on the government as a whole. This will be in line with the Jubilee manifesto.

Sharing of public information in new spaces

Social media allowed the sharing of public information in new spaces created through technology. Facebook and Twitter allowed communicators to engage in the new channels globally. The new channels of communication are currently accessed by majority of Kenyans who have internet enabled mobile phones and gadgets (Simon *et al*, 2014). This therefore enabled the Ministries to reach the public conveniently and in a personal way. One respondent for instance said that:

Twitter and Facebook allow us to have a wider audience to reach and enables us to engage the public in online forums of communication.

Opportunities for Multiple Exposures to Messages

The respondents also reported in the interviews that social media provided them with opportunities for multiple exposures to messages by the public. Government Information was accessed both on the Social media and the Traditional media of communication by the public. The messages on Twitter could also be shared on Facebook for multiplicity. The messages on social media were at times also relayed to the traditional media houses for dissemination to the publics who were not able to access through the social media of communication. Some respondents said:

Social media helps us keep pace with other ministries of the government and what they have been up to. We share this content on our social media pages if it relates to our publics as well”

“Social media has helped us to closely work in liaison with the presidency. We are able to get content from the president’s social media page and share it in our respective ministry page. We check his Facebook and Twitter accounts often for us to be abreast with the happenings.”

Testing how messages resonate with the public

The respondents also responded that the fact that through social media, it was easier to test how their messages resonated with their publics in different spaces. They were able to tell the viewership of their content and see the feedback in the comments section, likes from the stories and the retweets on the twitter messages. The stories on the pages posted at various dates and time allow the social media manager to get timely feedback on the content posted. This generally improved communication between the government and the public. The number of likes, visits and comments enabled the ministry to tell how the message was received by the public. The feedback in most cases was immediate.

Allows for user generated content

Facebook and Twitter also allowed user generated content which gave constant feedback to the ministries. This allowed the ministries to get any concerns from the public, frustrations in service delivery and also complements on where service was well rendered by the ministry and where they needed to improve. Facebook and Twitter allowed them to read the users comments as they were posted and even collect new information from their key followers and the bloggers. This mainly included sharing information by bloggers, other government ministries and the media houses that would air the story through the traditional media of communication in their news bulletins or as press releases.

Collection of feedback in real time

Facebook and Twitter allowed the communicators to listen and collect feedback in real time. The respondents felt this was an advantage because it was easy for them to monitor conversations as they occur in real time on the Facebook and Twitter accounts. The real time aspect of communication is critical because it ensures that communication efforts between the government and the people are relevant, meaningful and useful to the audiences. The findings also indicated that social media was adopted because it was easier to use it for communication and also a faster way of reaching the public who were connected to the internet.

One respondent interviewed said:

We are able to send out information through our Facebook and twitter pages at a snap of a moment. We are able to do that during press conferences here in the ministry and also when we go out for activities in the field. We are then able to tell the reception of the messages we have uploaded online.

Through this, the government would be able to get the feedback from people on their leadership, identify the information gaps that they need to fill, and then adjust their messages accordingly.

Ministries able to set their own communication agenda

The respondents also stated that Facebook and twitter accounts created by the respective ministries had given them a forum to communicate to their specific publics and even offer them a chance to engage directly on distinct issues for their ministry. One respondent said:

We are able to set the communication agenda for our ministry. The world has gone social media thus we as a ministry are in charge of our stories in the ministry. We can now tell our story the best we know. We are not affected by priming and framing from the traditional media houses who take certain angles to a story. We are in a better position to inform our publics about our policies and procedures that are specific to our ministry because we are in charge- we are the gatekeepers.

Access to the Internet and Citizen Engagement

The researcher also sought to investigate how adequate access to the internet contributed to successful citizen engagement through social media. The respondents agreed that the internet played a key role in facilitating communication through social media thus engaging with the various publics for the ministries. The lack of internet connectivity resulted in lack of efficient communication on the social media pages.

Respondents also reported that the internet connectivity increased the level of citizen participation and decision making in the matters of public interest. These immediate feedback is always in terms of complains, congratulation messages and suggestions from the members of the public. It enabled immediate response on particular issues raised by the publics.

One of the respondents said:

With good internet connectivity, our publics' level of participation in our business as a ministry to serve them is much better. The Internet allows us to get feedback from our stakeholders in real time and allows them to contribute in decision making in matters of public interest.

The researcher found out that the internet was considered as the “trend” - everybody seemed to need to be connected to the internet as a trend or as a sign of modernity. The internet allowed the social media managers to engage in communication though most of this communication was during day time. During the day is when most people accessed the internet and seemed to be more concerned with the posts from the government ministries. Many users have phones that are internet enabled and laptops that allow them to connect to the internet when they need to communicate. This is mainly through the Local area networks (LAN) and the Wi-Fi options. One respondent alluded that:

The internet is active all the time and does not restrict communication so long as one has a gadget that is internet enabled. The engagement with most of our publics is mostly during the day and so we work to ensure we are online and we can read the comments from our public. Most of them are on the Internet during the day time.

Availability of resources and its influence on citizen engagement through social media

The findings indicated that the free Wi-Fi needed to be provided to ensure continuous connectivity both from the government side and from the members of the public who engage in communication through social media with the government. The respondents also reported that the internet provider's fees were high for the purchase of bundles which made it expensive to communicate via the internet. The respondent said:

Resources are key when it comes to internet connectivity and connection. We need more Wi-Fi access wherever we are so that we can update the public more on the ministries activities. The Wi-Fi also needs to be accessible to our public who will then be in a better position to engage with us. The internet providers are charging us exorbitantly for us to communicate online. These rates need to come down to enable us communicate more and better with our publics.

The findings also indicated that government offices have invested heavily in the connectivity of the offices to the internet. The infrastructure in the office is made in a way to ensure most of the computers are connected to the internet through Local area networks. However, the resources that are set aside for this are not adequate. One respondent responded that:

Resources in our ministry are meager and especially to our citizens who we expect should come online to engage with us on our social media pages. Majority of the citizens fail to meet the requirements of smartphones and laptops to use in communication through social media.

Another respondent added that:

Limited resources means less people are able to access social media meaning that their voices are not heard. We as a ministry are therefore not able to reach them and communicate with them in real time through social media.

The issue of citizen engagement would therefore call both the ministry side and the public to frequently communicate. However this challenge of resources can be attributed to the low number of likes, visits and followers of these social media pages. For instance, the total number of likes visits and follows from the various government ministries involved in this study. The numbers are considerably low as compared to the general population of Kenyans and also those who have registered on the social media platforms particularly Facebook and twitter.

Findings also indicated that maintenance of equipment was necessary otherwise communication through social media would be a challenge from the ministry. This equipment included the available desktop computers, the laptops and the tablets that were used to access the Facebook and twitter accounts. Others included the Local area network cables and the various connection ports and points in the offices.

Some of the respondents said that their offices did not have internet connections and they did not have the Local area networks which frustrated their efforts in communicating through the social media in real time. The study showed that there was lack of internet connection in the office and where there was connection in some ministries; the internet speed was very low thus making social networking an uphill task.

One respondent said:

We do not have infrastructure in place to support our usage of the internet in this office. You can see this office has only two access points yet we are four in this office. We have to keep moving our work spaces so as to connect to the Internet. This is such an inconvenience at times.

The respondent further alluded that office infrastructure does not favor connectivity. The department had made requests for more equipment and infrastructure that would support connectivity in the office and work stations. There were however administrative issues that made it difficult for procurement of the equipment. This can be linked to the government bureaucracy that affects acquisition of equipment as well as the budget distribution across the ministries.

One respondent reported that:

We lack internet connection in our office. The LAN ports are few and our office infrastructure does not favour connectivity to the internet. We have requested for better equipment to help us communicate better but currently we have experienced administrative issues in procurement of the equipment. The ministry also lacks a switch box which is crucial in our communications. We are currently being hosted by another ministry thus we share the services of one switchbox.

The lack of essential equipment of communication such as a switch box and internet cables poses a great challenge for citizen engagement through social media with the concerned ministries. This limits communication in many ways. The government needs to invest in the essential equipment for the ministries to seriously engage through social media with the public.

Format of Facebook and Twitter and its influence on Social media use for citizen engagement

Twitter

The findings indicated that Twitter was more used than Facebook in most of the ministries by the social media managers. The sharing of stories from the ministries was mostly on the Twitter handle. Twitter format allowed the users to be in control of the information they needed to share and that which was deemed to be personal. The respondents said they were able to choose whether to retweet or not any information that they received.

This allowed them to gate keep on what they channeled out through their twitter account. The tweet was mostly accompanied by a photograph of the happenings

Twitter also allowed for more user generated content from the public. This was because of the use of the #tag that allowed the public to post information to the specific ministries. Respondents also noted that twitter was fast in terms of coming up with a message and sending. These messages were restricted in the number of characters and even the size of images. This then meant that the communication became faster but also was limited in terms of the content that could be channeled out on twitter. There is total control on what is posted on the twitter page for the ministry.

Facebook

The respondents noted that the format of Facebook influenced how they used social media for citizen engagement. This is because Facebook allowed them to share detailed information which could be uploaded on the ministry's page.

Facebook also allowed for greater user generated content to be sourced from the users. This is because any one with a Facebook account can access and post on the Ministry's Facebook page. This creates a better opportunity for user generated content. A user said:

Facebook to me generally means freedom of expression between the ministry and the Kenyan public who seek our services.

Facebook also allowed the users to download and use the content in future a feature that made it possible for the officers to constantly update their profile information.

The quality of information posted on Facebook is also better than that posted via twitter which is mostly a summary. Facebook also is interactive in its nature. It allows the users to engage in a string of conversations that are related to a story that is uploaded. This allows for real-time feedback from members of the public or from the ministry. This is for instance:

Observable Results for measuring whether a message is well received or not on Facebook and Twitter

Observable results for twitter

For twitter, the officers observed the number of responses received on the postings, the likes on the messages as well as the retweets on the messages. The number of retweets and the nature of feedback by users was the best method used to ascertain whether the ministries message is well received or not. The number of comments and likes received per particular tweet indicated results as to how the message was received by the audience.

The respondents also recorded that the number of retweets indicated how the message was received. If the retweets were many then the message was received positively by the audience but if the retweets are low then it indicated to the social media manager that the message was not received appropriately by the target audience.

Observable results for Facebook

The respondents indicated that Facebook had a tracking mechanism to ensure the message is received. The ministries page would receive a notification any time the message was shared, anytime there was a new comment, how many comments were received as well as the likes the message received. These were the main observable results that the social media managers looked out for in a post. The observable results that respondents used to ascertain whether their message is well received or not was basically indicated by the number of shares, comments and likes received per particular comment. Further they found out that the other observable results included number of followers, check on, likes and visits on the Facebook pages owned by the respective ministries.

For instance, one of the respondents replied:

When I post on the Facebook page I will usually check to see how many likes, shares and comments my message has received. People who like and share the information I post help me to know whether my message was well received by my target audience or not.

Conclusion

Social media adoption helps make communication between the government and the public more effective. The main reasons why the ministries adopted social media for communication included the following:-

The need to constantly update the public on the happenings in the ministry, the wide audience reached through using social media, the Jubilee government manifesto and the shift to a digital government, for sharing of public information in new spaces created by technology, the social media offer the government with opportunities for multiple exposures to messages, direct engagement with the public, ability to test how messages resonate with the public, access to user generated content, collection of feedback in real time, increased accountability and transparency through social media, the ministries are also able to be in charge of their stories by writing them and publishing them through social media. Resources are key in the connectivity and use of social media for citizen engagement, office infrastructure in the ministries does not favor internet connectivity. The lack of essential equipment of communication such as a switch box and internet cables also poses a great challenge for citizen engagement through social media with the concerned ministries.

Recommendations

The government ministries should come up with a communication strategy for each ministry that will acknowledge the specific use of social media for government engagement with the public.

The strategy should address the specific issues on how social media should be used to effectively and engage with the public, taking advantage of the interactive nature of the media of communication.

The government ministries should also constantly evaluate their communication practice on their use of social media for public communication. The ministries need to evaluate if they meet their target objectives on their use of social media. The set objectives should focus on the degree of engagement exhibited on their social media pages, how user generated content is treated, collection of real time feedback, the use of social media to allow the public engage in policy formulation and implementation, the use of social media to ease information access, the use of social media for civic education and generally for public participation.

The study also recommends that government ministries should adopt engagement as a strategy when using social media for public communication. The communication officers need to creatively come up with ways that will allow them to directly reach out to the public and meet their expectations in terms of information access. The lack of active engagement between the government and the public leads to apathy among the citizens which is a setback to democracy and freedom of expression. Citizens who are generally uninformed or not engaged with the government are likely to develop an attitude of indifference towards the government yet the government exists in order to help the citizens meet their needs. Social media can clearly help facilitate this direct engagement between the government and the public.

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