Chapter 10
Beyond Web 2.0. Social Media and Urban Educated Youths Participation in Kenyan Politics

Julius Mwashimba M. Kirigha
National Museums of Kenya, Kenya

Lynete Lusike Mukhongo
Moi University, Kenya

Robert Masinde
Moi University, Kenya

ABSTRACT
The purpose of the study, was to contribute to a further understanding of the shifting dynamics in youth political communication enabled by advancements in ICTs and explore the extent to which social media use has impacted on both institutional and extra-institutional political participation. The study sought to critically analyse the relationship between social media use and urban youth political participation by integrating both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to generate data using web based questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions among undergraduate students aged 18-24 years. From the findings it emerged that a majority of educated urban youth prefer to use Facebook to access political information. In addition, the users viewed social media as a free space where they could express their political views without censorship or regulation. As a result, it was established that as the use of social media increases, so does participation in politics, indicating a positive relationship between how youth use social media and their participation in politics.

INTRODUCTION
The Internet is a democratizing medium supported by its capacity to provide increased access to information and interaction, thus bringing more individuals into the political process. For instance, social networks have become key sources of political information and are offering civic engagement alternatives for younger users who ordinarily would not have been attracted to political subjects (Auskalniene, 2012). This has afforded platforms on which political, social and economic freedoms can be expanded (Diamond, 2010), occasioned by the fact that it is a virtual space of diverse information where people

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can often communicate without fear of censorship or gatekeeping that is often characteristic of broadcast and print mainstream media. In particular, the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 information communication technologies platform, has afforded more opportunities for citizens to access, interact with politicians and/or political institutions, and discuss or challenge discourses offered and enabled by the governing authorities. While Web 1.0 consisted of read-only static websites, Web 2.0 consists of internet-driven digital communication platforms characterized by user produced interactive, collaborative and participatory two-way communication thus supporting social media (Auskalniene, 2012). Unlike web 1.0 which has minimal interaction, the Web 2.0 platform allows for interaction between internet users and the sites. Social media on the other hand refers to a web 2.0 application which is enabled by Web 2.0 interactivity to enable users to generate their own content. Social media as typical applications of Web 2.0, which are web-based platforms that integrate different media, information and communication technologies previously used strictly for socializing, but currently being used for many other purposes, key among them being marketing, corporate communications and as sources of political information (Fuchs, 2011). Understanding social media critically means, to engage with the different forms of sociality on the Internet in the context of society (Fuchs, 2014). Consequently, the emergence of web 2.0 has created platforms for the growth of social media through social networking sites (Facebook and LinkedIn), video sharing sites (You tube), blogs (BlogSpot and WordPress), wikis (Wikipedia) and microblogs (Twitter and Weibo), whereby users are able to upload social media such as videos, blogs, and images. (Fuchs, 2014). The existence of social networking sites and microblogs is therefore spearheaded by the interactivity nature of Web 2.0 and user generated content of social media (Mukhongo, 2015).

Social media therefore enables users to not only be consumers, but also producers of content. Consequently, with Web 2.0 applications, people are enabled to collaborate, publish and discuss online more than ever before and audiences have become both content producers and consumers of information. The “prosumer” status enabled on social media is associated with the continued blurring of the line that separates producer from consumer of online content (Toffler, 1980). Consequently, peer-to-peer networks help to build online communities in new and unique ways (Barnes, 2008). The public sphere created by social media means that individuals can thus freely engage in critical public debate that is characteristic of democracy in politics (Habermas 1991 cited in Fuchs, 2014). This makes social media an important media for public debate and participation. It is beyond this ‘prosumer’ status of Web 2.0 enabled platforms that social media finds application in politics.

BACKGROUND

While the internet has been used for political communication since its inception, the arrival of Web 2.0 marked the beginning of a different and previously unimagined conceptualisation of the internet as a political tool and its potentials there forth (Theocaris, 2012). The new and expanded opportunities for political engagement facilitated through social media and the culture of sharing and participation it cultivates are therefore, particularly relevant for youth, who have generally been marginal players in mainstream politics in Kenya. The urban youth are heavy users of the internet and the development of the media, particularly Facebook has provided the youth with a friendly media platform (Otieno and Mukhongo, 2013). While the internet has come under attack by several scholars who argue that people are surfing the internet instead of engaging in civic and political activities (Boulianne, 2009), what is key here is the fact that if the internet is appropriated by the youth for democratic participation, it would offer a lot of opportunities for civic engagement among the youth in Kenya.