

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN COUNTY GOVERNANCE: A CASE STUDY OF KISII COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: *In Kenya, inadequate public debates on county budget priorities and choices, due to communication break down between the public and the county governments, has led to poor transparency and weak accountability. This has greatly undermined the spirit of devolution. Empirical studies indicates that, social media can be an effective platform for participatory budgeting. This study therefore set out to examine the effects of social media use in participatory budgeting in Kenya`s County governance, with a special focus on Kisii County.*

Study Objectives: *The specific objectives of the study were to; examine the influence of social media on public participation in Kisii County Government`s budget preparation process; identify the most effective social media platforms for public participation in kisii County Government`s budget preparation process; examine how the public uses social media as a participatory platform in Kisii County Government`s budget preparation process and explore how social media is used by Kisii County government as a platform for public participation in the budget preparation process.*

Scope: *The study set out to examine the effects of social media use in participatory budgeting in County governance, with a special focus on Kisii County. The choice of Kisii County was based on the fact that it is among the Counties hardest hit by public apathy in the budget preparation process, due to communication break down between the County Government and the citizenry since 2013. Bonchari Sub- County, which is one of the Sub-counties constituting Kisii County, was purposively selected as the sampling area, based on the intensity of community protests against implementation of the county government programmes, viewed incompatible with public priorities or choices.*

Findings: *Among the study findings is that social media platforms, especially Facebook and WhatsApp are popular among the citizens and thus effective for participatory budgeting. Unfortunately, their use by Kisii County government as participatory platforms in the budget preparation process is limited and sporadic. The results of the study will be significant to Governments and their budgeting stakeholders in determining the best ways of social media use for participatory budgeting. The study finally recommends that Kisii County government should be proactive in the use of social media technologies for effective e-participatory budgeting.*

Keywords: *county governance, devolution, participatory budgeting, social media*

INTRODUCTION

The significance of social media use in participatory budgeting has been emphasized by various scholars in the field of governance and communication. This is due to the belief that social media can effectively facilitate online discourses and public engagement on governance decisions (Gordon, 2014). This is made possible because of reasons such as ; first the social media networking sites like Facebook, Google +, YouTube, Myspace, LinkedIn, Instagram and blogs are becoming popular globally in everyday language as far as information dissemination and sharing capabilities are concerned (Malcom,2011).Therefore, the combination of both mobile communication devices such as Tablet computers and Smartphones as well as other friendly interface of social media platforms have enabled people with shared interests as well as philosophies in different parts of the world to act as if they are in one village, thus contributing to the idea of ``global village''(Mc Luhan,2012). Secondly, the sharing of information and uploading of photos via social media is usually immediate and this makes information dissemination far more convenient and viral in nature (Mergel, 2012). Again, Social networking sites differ from the other traditional media forms due to their ability of allowing instant dialogic communication (Nielsen, 2012).

Although the surge for participatory budgeting is growing in experience, public apathy, due to inadequate communication between the governments and the citizenry is still the biggest challenge to the process globally. Consequently, poor transparency and weak accountability has been a plague for most global governments (IMF, 2015). Global governments have thus been urged to build on existing and active social media platforms that the citizens in the communities are utilizing in order to enhance participation of the entire population in debates on budget priorities and policy choices (Ebdon and Frankline, 2014). Indeed, from the early 1990 and into the new millennium, the International Budget Partnership`s Open Budget and the IMF`s code of good practices on fiscal transparency have all along endeavoured to promote the active use of social media technologies for effective participatory budgeting at all levels of governments globally (Murray and Shields, 2015).

PB has also been implemented as a form of open governance in African in countries like South Africa, Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda at both national and sub-national levels. However, the process has been ineffective due to public apathy, which is as a result of inadequate communication between the public and the governments. Consequently, fiscal stress that has manifested itself in the form of poor transparency and weak accountability has plagued the Africa continent for many years. This has greatly contributed to political instabilities as well as hostilities in the continent. The African governments have thus been challenged to expand the use of online technologies so as to enhance participation of the entire population in budget making processes (Khagram, 2014).

Inspired by successful efforts of PB in Brazil and other countries in the world, Kenya has also implemented the process to allow the public to directly determine on how certain government funds should be utilized for purposes of transparency as well as accountability, especially at the County levels. However, one of the biggest threat to this approach is that not sufficient active participation of the public to make these efforts legitimate and meaningful. Hence, poor transparency and weak accountability, coupled with community protests have plagued most county governments since the year 2013. County governments have thus been urged to build on existing as well as active social media technologies that their communities are currently using in order to facilitate online discourses and public engagement in all the stages of the budget preparation processes and cycle. In this regard, County governments have been urged to proactively identify those who are mostly left in

their budget preparation processes, especially via the online technologies and work out to incorporate them (TA, 2016).

It is evident that even though social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp were originally popular sites for social interactions and private contacts, they have become very effective communication tools for governments and their agencies who are increasingly using them for many reasons. Most importantly, they (governments) use them to enhance their image as well as communication with their external publics, in addition to influencing as well as raising awareness on governance issues like budgeting to their audiences. Thus they can be used for surveying opinions, findings, initiating public debates, sharing news and information, offering a look behind the scenes of the government, soliciting feedback, promoting and publicising public events as well as enhancing citizen participation in key governance decisions like budgeting (Iskander, 2011). It is for this reason that the study set out to examine the effects of social media use in participatory budgeting in Kenya's County governance, with a special focus on Kisii County.

Participatory Budgeting in the Context of Kenya's County Governance

Participatory Budgeting process in Kenya's County governance can be traced back to the country's decentralization initiatives. These include the District Focus for Rural Development initiatives of the 1980s to the proliferation of decentralization of funds trend which began in 1990s and continues to date. The Local Authority Service Delivery Action Plan (LASDAP) was introduced in year 2000 to facilitate public participation by identifying their local development needs and priorities. The CDF Act, 2003, equally provided for participation of communities through project identification at the constituency level. This CDF Act, 2003, has since been amended to align itself with the constitution of Kenya 2010 (Murutu, 2014).

Following the enactment of the new constitution in the year 2010, Kenya's 47 County governments, including Kisii County government were established. This paradigm shift from the centralised to the decentralised form of governance was precipitated by many shortcomings that are often associated with the any centralised system of governance. These shortcomings include among others; inadequate public participation in key governance decisions or programmes like budgeting (TA and NTA, 2018). The emphasis on public participation in County governance decisions like budgeting further resonates from the global experience which attests that strengthening of bottom up participatory mechanisms is one of the key ingredients to effective devolution or decentralization (Finch, 2011).

The devolved system of governance in Kenya has therefore brought with it greater demands and aspirations for participatory budgeting to ensure that there is greater transparency and accountability as well as equitable distribution of resources. County governments receive a lot of funds from local revenues and the national treasury that needs to be scrutinized by the public and accounted for. In the 2017/2018 fiscal year for example, over Ksh 307 billion from the national government was shared among all the 47 counties. The Kisii County government, that is the focus of this study, received over Ksh 8 billion. In addition to this, the County government collects over Ksh 2 billion from the local revenues or levies annually (KCG, 2016).

Constitutional Provisions and Legal Framework for Participatory Budgeting Implementation in Kenyan Counties

The Constitution of Kenya 2010, provides a window in terms of constitutional provisions as well as the legal framework for participatory budgeting implementation, especially at County levels. First, the constitution of Kenya 2010, effectively established a two tier devolved system of governance which comprises of the national

government as well as 47 devolved governments. Both of these tiers of government are distinct but equally interdependent and usually work on mutual ground on the basis of cooperation and consultation. Both the legislative and executive arms of the devolved governments are responsible for the revenues collection and allocation as well as delivery of public service (GOK, 2010).

Articles (1), (2), and (3) and (4) of the Kenyan Constitution 2010 states that, all the sovereign power belongs to the people and shall be exercised only in accordance with the constitution. It further states that the people may exercise their sovereign power either directly or indirectly through their democratically elected representatives. The sovereign power of the people under the constitution of Kenya is delegated to a number of different organs which includes; parliament and legislative assemblies in the county governments, executive arm as well as the judicial arm (GOK, 2010).

Public participation in key county governance decisions like budgeting is espoused in Article 10 of the constitution of Kenya 2010 as one of the national values and principles of governance. According to Article 174 (c), the aim of devolution is to promote active participation of people in the exercise of the state powers as well as making decisions affecting them. (GOK, 2010).

According to the Constitution of Kenya 2010, article 184 (1) (c), mechanisms that facilitates public participation in governance should be included in the national legislation. This article further asserts that the rationale for active public participation in governance is based on the foundation that the people of Kenya have sovereign powers which they have delegated to the state actors at the county levels as well as the national level. This sovereignty has to be respected and institutionalized in all governance processes like budgeting (GOK, 2010).

Article 174 (d) of the Kenyan Constitution 2010, also asserts that, communities have a right to manage their own affairs and to further their development (GOK, 2010).

According to Article 10 (2) a, b and c of the Kenyan Constitution 2010, the national values and principles of good governance includes democracy and participation of the citizens, inclusiveness, good governance, integrity, transparency as well as accountability (GOK, 2010).

The county governments Act, 2012 part 2 section 6 further states that, `` in exercising its powers or performing any of its functions, a County Government shall ensure efficiency, effectiveness, inclusivity and participation of the people. `` (GOK, 2010).

In regard to Article 35 of the Kenyan Constitution 2010, all the citizens have the right to access any information held by the government. Article 232 (1) d again states that, `` the values and principles of public service includes the involvement of the people in the processes of policy making and transparency as well as provision of timely and accurate information.`` (GOK, 2010).

Fourth schedule part of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 2 (14) asserts that, `` the functions as well powers of the devolved governments are to coordinate and ensure effective participation of communities in key governance decisions like budgeting. County governments must also assist communities to develop administrative capacities to enhance their exercise of power and participation in governance at the local level`` (GOK, 2010).

Section 95 of the County governments Act, 2012, of the Kenyan Constitution 2010 further mandates devolved governments to establish various mechanisms that facilitates public communication and access of information

to the citizens. These mechanisms include use of media with the widest public outreach, like social media technologies, community radio stations, public meetings, Televisions, Newspapers, Posters etc. (GOK, 2012).

The Public Finance Management Act, 2012, Section 125(2) of the Kenyan Constitution 2010 again provides a number of the key finance principles which includes the need to ensure that there is greater transparency as well as accountability in all matters related to public finance and that effective public participation should be emphasized in all stages of county budget preparation processes.

Sections 100 and 101 of the County governments Act, 2012, further mandates the County governments to create an institutional framework for civic education on matters related to county budgeting (GOK, 2012).

County governments must therefore demonstrate the capacity or ability to get things done in a manner that is responsive to the demands of the citizens and the constitution, while being open to any public criticism as well as scrutiny so as to ensure their legitimacy (NTA, 2018). This can be attained through the establishment of a dialogic communication with the public via media with the widest public outreach like social media technologies on all matters related to governance like budgeting (TA, 2016).

Statement of the Research Problem

For purposes of greater transparency and accountability, the constitution of Kenya 2010, particularly the Public Finance Management Act, 2012, Section 125 (2), calls for active public participation in all phases of the county budget preparation process, via the most effective media in terms of outreach and cost, which includes among others, social media platforms. Unfortunately, this has not been meaningfully achieved as most empirical studies indicates. For instance, surveys by TIK and NTA (2018) indicates that, public apathy in Kenya`s county budget preparation processes, due to the communication breakdown between the County governments and the public, has been the major hindrance to effective devolution since 2013. The above surveys cite that, more than 75% of the locals have never participated in the county budget preparation processes. Many county governments` budgetary allocations are thus faced with problems of either over budgeting or under budgeting due to lack of adequate information and public involvement in the budget preparation process. This has undermined the spirit of devolution in Kenya and especially in Kisii County, which is one of the Counties worst hit as the above surveys further reveals. Could this public apathy in the county budget preparation processes be as a result of ineffective use of social media as a participatory instrument? It is against this backdrop that the study set out to examine the effects of social media use in participatory budgeting in Kenya`s County governance, with a special focus on Kisii County.

Many studies have been done on the effects of social media use in participatory budgeting in developed countries like Brazil, USA, UK, Spain and Germany. However, comprehensive studies on the effects of social media use in participatory budgeting in Kenya`s County governance and especially with reference to Kisii County are inadequate, a gap that this study filled in the literature.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the effects of social media use in participatory budgeting in Kenya`s County governance, with a special focus on Kisii County.

Specific Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were to;

- (i) examine the influence of social media on public participation in Kisii County Government`s budget preparation process,
- (ii) identify the most effective social media platforms for public participation in Kisii County Government`s budget preparation process,
- (iii) examine how the public uses social media as a participatory platform in Kisii County Government`s budget preparation process and
- (iv) explore how Kisii County government uses social media as a platform for public participation in the budget preparation process.

Basic Assumptions of the Study

The study was conducted under the assumption that the sample taken was representative, the instruments used for data collection were valid and reliable and that the respondents were able to give honest and accurate information. It was also assumed that both Kisii County Government and the citizens have embraced social media technology.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Bonchari Sub- County, which is one of the 9 administrative Sub-Counties constituting the Kisii County was purposively selected as the sampling area for the study that is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Descriptive design was adopted and both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed to ensure methodological triangulation. The sample size was 399 residents. 4 key informants were also interviewed. Both Simple random and Purposive sampling techniques were employed. Data collection was via questionnaires and individual interviews. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS, in which data tabulation, descriptive and disaggregation procedures of statistical analysis were employed. Thematic Content Analysis was further used to analyse the qualitative data.

DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND PRESENTATION

Questionnaire Return Rate

The study sample size was 399 subjects. In order to answer the research questions, 399 questionnaires were administered to the residents in the sampling units. However, the study sample size of 399 was not realized as the return rate was 380 (96.69%). This was considered adequate for analysis, conclusion and recommendations. A response rate of above 95% is adequate to represent the study sample and offer adequate information for the study analysis, conclusions and recommendations (Bryman, 2012).

Type of Residence

The researcher asked the respondents to indicate their type of residence. The rationale behind this question was to establish whether both urban and rural dwellers participate equally in county budgeting via online platforms. The results are presented in the table 1 below:

Table 1 Respondents Type of Residence.

| Residence Type | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Urban | 210 | 55% |
| Rural | 170 | 45% |

| | | |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Total | 380 | 100% |
|--------------|------------|-------------|

Table 1 above indicates that majority of the respondents (210; 55%) reside in the urban while (170; 45%) reside in the rural area. Bonchari Sub County is more largely urban and hence more urban residents than rural residents (KNBS, 2017). This implies that more urban residents participated in county budgeting via online platforms than the rural residents. The findings agrees with Pew Research Centre (2015) that citizens in urban and sub urban communities use online platforms than citizens in rural areas.

Social Media Influence on Public Participation in County Budgeting.

The first objective of the study was to examine the influence of social media on public participation in Kisii County Government`s budget preparation process. To achieve this, the respondents were asked questions in relation to the following indicators; degree of public knowledge on county budgeting issues via social media and the degree of public participation in county budgeting via social media.

Degree of Public Knowledge on County Budgeting Issues via Social Media

To determine the degree of public knowledge on county budgeting issues via social media, the respondents were asked to select from the list provided the communication channel(s) which they rely on most in seeking any county governance information.

The results to this regard are presented in the 2 table below:

Table 2 Communication Channel (s) which the Public Relies on Most in Seeking Any County Governance Information.

| Communication channel | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Radio | 90 | 24% |
| Newspaper | 75 | 20% |
| Television | 55 | 14% |
| Social Media | 100 | 26% |
| Posters | 20 | 5% |
| Public Meetings | 30 | 8% |
| Loudspeakers | 10 | 3% |
| Total | 380 | 100% |

Table 2 above indicates that majority respondents (100; 26%) rely most on social media in seeking any county governance information. This is followed closely by those who rely most on radio (90; 24%). Those who rely most on Newspapers for any county governance information were (75; 20%), Television (55; 14%), Public Meetings (30; 8%), Posters (20; 5%) and Loudspeakers (10; 3%).

Degree of Public Participation in County Budgeting via Social Media

To determine the degree of public participation in county budgeting via social media, respondents were asked using the *Likert Scale* to indicate the extent to which social media encourages them to participate in Kisii County governance issues like budgeting.

The results to this regard are presented in the table 3 next page:

Table 3 Extent to which Social Media Encourages Public Participation in County Budgeting

| Degree | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Very large Extent | 250 | 66% |
| Large Extent | 110 | 29% |
| Small Extent | 8 | 2% |
| Very Small Extent | 7 | 2% |
| No Extent | 5 | 1% |
| Total | 380 | 100% |

Table 3 above indicates that, majority of the respondents (250; 66%) were encouraged to a very large extent by social media to participate in county governance issues like budgeting, 110; 29% of the respondents were encouraged to a large extent, 8; 2% of the respondents were encouraged to a small extent, 7; 2% of the respondents are encouraged by a very small extent and only 5; 1% of the respondents were not encouraged to any extent to participate in county governance issues like budgeting by social media platforms.

In examining the influence of social media on public participation in county budgeting, the researcher further asked the Civil Society and Media Representatives in the interview to explain how they think social media influences public participation in county budgeting.

The Civil Society Representative said that,

“Social media in particular has revolutionised all government and individual communications. It can thus be an effective and useful tool for increasing public knowledge and participation in governance to a very large extent since it can present adequate information to a wider public on a range of governance issues like budgeting quickly. It also increases the speed of feedback and it can reduce dependence of traditional media and concentration of press coverage by the government which are sometimes inaccurate and expensive.”

(Personal Communication, November 22, 2017).

On her part, the Media Representative said that,

“Unlike the mainstream media, Social media platforms can be very effective for increasing public engagement in a range of County governance issues like budgeting since they are popular and give audiences a right to reply. Audiences can thus ask follow-up questions on the county governance issues and receive instant feedback which most mainstream media lacks Again, the three Fs (First, Fast and Fact) of Journalism are still applicable in social media. However, the mainstream media must be used together with online platforms for maximum effectiveness participation” (Personal Communication, November 24, 2017).

From the findings reported above quantitatively and qualitatively, it is clear that mainstream media has significantly slowed down in terms of usage as many people are mostly relying on social media for their communication endeavours as opposed to the mainstream media (Noor, 2012). Social media is therefore the most reliable and accessible communication channel for increasing public engagement and knowledge in the county government’s budgeting. This can be attributed to the fact that mainstream media is relatively more expensive than social media. Again, with the penetration of mobile phones, especially smart phones which are portable, access to social media platforms at any time has increased. Thus, it is a digital era and audiences are moving to social media world at a fast rate.

The above findings also reveal that social media has the potential of increasing public participation as well as knowledge and awareness in county budgeting to a very large extent compared to the mainstream media. This concurs with Tanaka (2007). Despite its newness, social media technology is proving to be a force to reckon with as far as information dissemination is concerned as it is very fast and therefore, to a large extent, it can be a very effective participatory tool in county governance decisions like budgeting (Gordon, 2014).

Most Effective Social Media Platforms for Public Participation in County Budgeting.

The second objective of the study was to identify the most effective social media platforms for public participation in Kisii County Government’s budget preparation process. To achieve this, the respondents were asked questions in relation to the following indicators; degree of public preferences in the use of each social media platform for participation in county budgeting and the degree of public participation in county budgeting via each social media platform.

Degree of Public Preferences in the Use of each Social Media Platform for Participation in County Budgeting

To determine the degree of public preferences in the use of each social media platform for participation in county budgeting, respondents were asked to select from the list provided the social media platform that they prefer most in their day today communication endeavours. They were also told to select more than one social media platform if applicable. The results are presented in the table 4 below:

Table 4 Social Media Platform(s) Used Most by the Public in their Day Today Communication Endeavours.

| Social Media Platform | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Facebook | 165 | 43% |
| Twitter | 33 | 9% |
| WhatsApp | 160 | 42% |
| Instagram | 3 | 0.7% |
| Google+ | 3 | 0.7% |
| LinkedIn | 3 | 0.7% |
| Facebook+Whatsapp+ Twitter | 13 | 3.4% |
| Total | 380 | 100% |

Table 4 above indicates that most respondents (165; 43%) prefer Facebook most in their day today communication endeavours. This is followed closely by those who prefer WhatsApp (160; 42%) most. 33; 9% of the respondents prefer Twitter most. Instagram, Google+ and LinkedIn are preferred most by (3; 0.7%) respondents each. 13; 3.4% of the respondents indicated that they prefer a combination of Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter most.

Thus Facebook stood out to be the most preferred popular platform. It is closely followed by Whatsapp. These findings concur with BAKE and IDC (2017).

Degree of Public Participation in County Budgeting via each Social Media Platform

To determine the degree of public participation in county budgeting via each social media platform, respondents were asked to select from the list provided the social media platform which encourages them most to participate in county governance decisions like budgeting. They were told to select more than one social media platform if applicable. The results are presented in the table 5 below.

Table 5 Social Media Platform (s) which Encourages the Public Most to Participate in County Governance Issues like Budgeting.

| SNS | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------|------------|-------------|
| Facebook | 150 | 39% |
| WhatsApp | 145 | 38% |
| Twitter | 45 | 12% |
| Facebook +WhatsApp | 20 | 7% |
| Facebook+ Twitter | 15 | 4% |
| Total | 380 | 100% |

As table 5 above indicates, majority of the respondents (150; 39%) are encouraged most by Facebook to participate in county governance decisions like budgeting. This is followed closely by those who are encouraged most by WhatsApp. 25; 7% of the respondents are encouraged most by a combination of Facebook and WhatsApp .Only 15; 4% of the respondents are encouraged most by a combination of Facebook and Twitter to participate in county governance decisions like budgeting. The findings agree with Nyakoiro (2015).

To identify the most effective social media platforms for public participation in county budgeting, the researcher further asked the Civil Society Representative to explain what social media platform(s) are most effective for public participation in county governance issues like budgeting in the interview and he said that,

“Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter are the most effective platforms for public participation in all governance issues like budgeting in Kenya respectively. This is because of their popularity among the citizens and hence, they have a wider outreach. Facebook and WhatsApp walls can allow citizens to post any governance decision without fearing as their identities may not necessarily be revealed. Twitter can also be used in setting up trends related to governance issues like budgeting.” (Personal Communication, December 10 2017).

Social Media Use by the Public for Participation in County Budgeting.

The third objective of the study was to examine how social media is used by the public as a participatory platform in Kisii County Government`s budget preparation process. To achieve this objective, the respondents were asked questions in reference to the following indicators; public accessibility of social media platforms for participation in county budgeting, public accessibility of county budgeting information via social media, public`s frequency of social media use for participation in county budgeting and the public accessibility of devices used to access social media sites.

Public Accessibility of Social Media Platforms for Participation in County Budgeting

To determine the public accessibility of social media platforms for participation in county budgeting, respondents were asked to select from the list provided the social media platform (s) that they have active accounts in. The results are presented in the table 6 below:

Table 6 Social Media Platform (s) which the Public have Active Accounts in

| SNS | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Facebook | 165 | 43% |
| WhatsApp | 160 | 42% |
| Twitter | 33 | 9% |
| Instagram | 13 | 3% |
| LinkedIn | 6 | 2% |
| Google+ | 3 | 1% |
| Total | 380 | 100% |

As table 6 above table indicates, most respondents (165; 43%) have active accounts in Facebook. This is followed closely by those who have active accounts in WhatsApp (160; 42%). 33; 9% of the respondents have active accounts in Twitter, 13; 3% have active accounts in Instagram, 6; 2% have active accounts in LinkedIn and only 3% of the respondents are active in Google+.

In determining the public accessibility of social media platforms for participation in county budgeting, the researcher further asked the Civil Society and Media Representatives in the interview to explain the extent to which the public uses social media platforms for participation in county governance issues like budgeting.

The Civil Society Representative said that:

“Most people are always more active on their Facebook accounts than on their Twitter accounts. But of late, they are more active on WhatsApp because sharing of news stories and chatting on private issues is instant and safe. Again, with WhatsApp, they able to access many news including government information from the many groups that they belong to instantly. Facebook and WhatsApp are thus the most popular among the citizens for county governance issues like budgeting.” (Personal Communication, December 12, 2017).

The Media Representative on her part said that:

“Facebook seems to be a very popular platform among the citizens in Kenya because all phones with internet connections usually come pre-installed with Facebook App and this makes it easily available for all people. Every person with a Twitter account has a Facebook account but not all Facebook accounts holders are Twitter account holders. Again, Facebook is simple to use. This makes Facebook to be a very popular platform among the citizens in Kenya for governance matters. However, the popularity of Facebook seems to be overtaken by whatsApp of late” (Personal Communication, December 28, 2017).

From the study findings reported above quantitatively and qualitatively, it is evident that Facebook stood out as the most popular social media platform for the public. This is closely followed by WhatsApp and then Twitter. These findings concurs with (BAKE & IDC, 2017) that these platforms are the most popular among the citizens in Kenya.

The popularity of Facebook among the citizens can also be attributed to the fact that it was the first platform to be founded. Its simplicity also makes it possible for many people to adopt it. Facebook can again be used with many phones even those with 2G connections unlike other platforms. Furthermore, key telecommunication companies like Safaricom have also made it absolutely affordable to access Facebook, to some extent free to utilize as compared to other social media platforms.

The popularity of WhatsApp however seems to be overtaking that of Facebook. This can be attributed to the fact that it offers a more closed and private messaging which allows the users to share information without the fear of embarrassment, even if the content is comprised of photos or potentially contagious news articles. It thus offers end to end encryption and it is thus regarded as a safe means of sharing sensitive information. Furthermore, WhatsApp appeals to most people since it has an instant delivery of messages and is readily available even on small Java phones. Unlike Facebook and WhatsApp, Twitter only deals with Tweets and therefore attracts fewer users. Accessibility of the versatile smart phones, further makes it possible for the citizens to access many social media Apps. Thus many people are able to use both Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter. The popularity of LinkedIn, Instagram YouTube and Google+ seems to be lower due to the fact that they are probably newer. However, Facebook, Google+, 2go, .Skype and Twitter are the most popular platforms among the citizenry (Ezma *et al.*, 2015).

Public Accessibility of County Budgeting Information via Social Media

To establish the public accessibility of county budgeting information via social media platforms, respondents were asked whether they have ever sought county governance information via any social media platforms. The results are presented in the table 7 below:

Table 7 whether Respondents have ever Sought County Governance Information via Social Media Platforms.

| S/N | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|------------|-------------|
| Yes | 300 | 79% |
| No | 80 | 21% |
| | 380 | 100% |

Table 7 above indicates that most respondents (300; 79%) have used social media platforms to seek information related to county governance and only 80; 21% respondents have not used social media platforms to seek county governance information.

This indicates that most citizens are aware of the importance attached to social media platforms as participatory platforms in county governance issues like budgeting. This concurs with the IDC & BAKE (2017) studies which indicates that more than 75% of Kenyans use social media platforms to search for government information. A study by Pew Research Centre (2016), also concurs with this findings as it indicates that more than 55% of Americans use social media technologies to engage the Federal agencies in governance decisions like budgeting.

Public`s Frequency of Social Media Use for Participation in County Budgeting.

To determine the public`s frequency of social media use for participation in county budgeting, respondents were asked to select from the list provided how often they seek county governance information via social media platforms. The results are presented the table 8 below:

Table 8 How often the Public Seeks County Governance Information via Social Media.

| S/NO | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Daily | 197 | 52% |
| Weekly | 112 | 29% |

| | | |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Monthly | 50 | 13% |
| By-Monthly | 21 | 6% |
| Total | 380 | 100% |

Table 8 indicates that most of the respondents (197; 52) seek information related to county governance via social media on daily basis, 112; 29% on Weekly basis, 50; 13% on Monthly basis and 21; 6% on Bi-monthly basis. Majority of the citizens are thus willing to participate in governance decisions like budgeting via social media platforms although the county government’s use of these platforms is sporadic and limited. Due to the growth of digital era, the audiences are fast moving to the social media. This findings concurs with Mawela (2016) that the citizens are willing to engage the government agencies via social media platforms more often as they have more access to SNS that have become essential components in their communication endeavours.

Public Accessibility of Devices Used to Access Social Media Sites

To determine the public accessibility of devices used to access social media sites, respondents were asked to select from the list provided the telecommunication devices that they use to access social media sites. They were told to select more than one device if applicable. The results are presented in the table 9 below:

Table 9 Device(s) used by the Public to Access Social Media Sites

| Device | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Cell phone | 200 | 53% |
| Home Computers | 20 | 5% |
| I-pad/Tablet | 40 | 11% |
| Office Computer | 20 | 5% |
| Cell phone + Office Computer | 100 | 26% |
| Total | 380 | 100% |

Table 9 above shows that majority of the respondents (200; 53%) use cell phones to access social media sites. 100; 26% respondents use cell phones plus office computers, 40; 11% of the respondents use I-pad/Tablets and 20; 5% of the respondents use home and office computers each.

To determine the Public accessibility of the online Telecommunication devices, the researcher further asked the Media Representative in the interview to explain how the public accesses the social media sites and he said that,

“Smartphones have become cheaper of late than the even personal computers. Therefore, most people are able to access social media apps at their convenience. It is also easier to operate smartphone than computers and Tablets .Furthermore major telecommunication companies like Safaricom and Airtel have expanded the penetration of smartphones and internet, even to the remote areas.” (Personal Communication, January 10, 2018).

The popularity of Cell phones, particularly smart phones can thus be attributed to the fact that they have become more affordable to most citizens than the I-Pads and home computers. Again, they are simple to operate to the majority of citizens as opposed to computers and tablets.

Many Kenyans are thus the using smart phones to access social media apps because of their convenience and versatility. This concurs with IDC (2016) report which asserts that mobile phones have boosted the expansion of online usage.

Social Media Use by County Government for Budgeting.

The fourth objective of the study was to explore how social media is used by Kisii County government as a participatory platform for the public in the budget preparation process. To achieve this, respondents were asked questions in relation to the following indicators; availability of social media platforms for the county government in budgeting and frequency of social media use by county government in budgeting.

Availability of Social Media Platforms in the County Government for Budgeting

To determine the availability of social media platforms in the county government for budgeting, respondents were asked to select from the list provided the social media platforms via which they normally receive county governance information like budgeting. They were told to select more than one answer if applicable. The results are presented in the table 10 below:

Table 10 Social Media Platform(s) via which the Public Receives County Governance Information like Budgeting.

| SNS | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Facebook | 200 | 53% |
| Twitter | 130 | 34% |
| Web Blog | 50 | 13% |
| Total | 380 | 100% |

Table 10 above indicates, most respondents (200; 53%) receive county governance information like budgeting via Facebook, 130; 34% via Twitter and 50; 13% via Web Blog.

In determining the availability of social media platforms for the county government in budgeting, the researcher further asked the County Director of Communications to explain how the county government uses social media platforms to engage the public on governance issues like budgeting and he said that,

“The county government utilizes only Facebook, Twitter and Google+ platforms to disseminate information to the public for they are the only platforms suggested in the county government’s communication policy of 2014. Since the policy has never been reviewed, it would be unprofessional to utilize other platforms. Furthermore, of the three available platforms, Facebook is utilized more than the other platforms since it is simple to operate and is popular among the citizens.”(Personal Communication, January, 18 2018).

As the above findings reveal, Facebook, Twitter and Web Blog are the only platforms available for use by the county government and thus the only platforms accessible to the public for engagement in governance issues. This findings concurs with Nyamasege & Musikali (2014) `s study which indicates that Facebook, Twitter and Google+ are the most popular platforms in Kenya`s county governments. Cottica & Bianchi (2010) also indicates that Facebook, Twitter and Blogs are the most popular in the Italian government agencies. Of the three listed social media platforms, Facebook stood out to be the most readily utilized platform by the county government. It is followed by Twitter and then Web Blog. The popularity of Facebook in the county government can be attributed to the fact that it is was the first to be founded and it`s simple to use.

Frequency of Social Media Use by County Government for Budgeting.

To determine the frequency of social media use by the county government for budgeting, respondents were asked to select from list provided how often they receive county governance information via its social media platforms.

The results are presented in the table 11 below:

Table 11 How Often the Public Receives County Governance Information via Social Media.

| Social Media Platform | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Yearly | 250 | 66% |
| Bi-monthly | 110 | 29% |
| Monthly | 20 | 5% |
| Total | 380 | 100% |

Table 11 above reveals that most respondents (250; 66%) receive information related to county governance via social media platforms yearly, 110; 29% receive county governance information Bi-monthly and 20; 5% receive county governance information monthly. No communication on daily and weekly basis from the county government as far as governance decisions is concerned via the online platforms.

To further determine the County Government’s Frequency of social media use for budgeting, the researcher asked the Member of the County Assembly in the interview to explain how often the County Government engages the public in governance issues like budgeting via social media and he said that,

“I rarely receives information related to county governance from the county government departments via her social media platforms. Whenever the county government is active on social media platforms, it is all about the governor’s political rallies and meetings which is often twice a month. County budget estimates are also posted on the county Website at the end of the fiscal year but no online engagement of the public on the fiscal decisions on daily basis.” (Personal Communication, January 28, 2018).

The above findings imply that the County government’s communication to citizens on key governance decisions like budgeting via social media platforms is sporadic and limited. This concurs with Mawela (2016), Mejabi & Fabgule (2014) and Eisherbiny (2015) who reveal in their studies that social media is untapped communication resource in governance as its utilization by the governments of their respective studies is limited and sporadic.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Key Study Findings

The study set out to examine the effects of social media use in participatory budgeting in Kenya’s County governance, with a special focus on Kisii County. The objectives of the study were to; examine the influence of social media on public participation in Kisii County Government’s budget preparation process, identify the most effective social media platforms for public participation in Kisii County Government’s budget preparation process, examine how social media is used by the public as a participatory platform in Kisii County Government’s budget preparation process and explore how social media is used by Kisii County government as a platform for public participation in the budget preparation process. The researcher employed a descriptive

survey design so as to adopt descriptive statistics. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted to ensure methodological triangulation. The researcher also employed both simple random and purposive sampling techniques and data collection was via questionnaires and individual interviews. The sample size was 399 subjects and four key informants. However, Questionnaire return rate was 380 subjects. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS, Version 22, where data tabulation, descriptive and disaggregation procedures of statistical analysis were employed and results finally presented in the form of tables that shows frequency and percentages for easy understanding. Qualitative data on the other hand was analysed using thematic content analysis and then results presented by reporting the key findings under each theme using appropriate verbatim quotations for in depth understanding of the issues.

The key findings of the study are summarized below:

Social Media Influence on Public Participation in County Budgeting.

The first objective of the study was to examine the influence of social media on public participation in Kisii County Government's budget preparation process. To achieve this, respondents were asked questions in relation to the following indicators; degree of public knowledge on county budgeting issues via social media and degree of public of public participation in county budgeting via social media. In regard to the degree of public knowledge on county budgeting issues via social media, respondents were asked to select from the list provided the communication channel(s) which they rely on most for any county governance information. The study found out that social media is most reliable communication channel as majority of the respondents (100; 26%) indicated that they rely on it most for any county governance information. 90; 24% of the respondents indicated that they rely on Radio most, 75; 20% indicated that rely on Newspapers most, 55; 14 % indicated that they rely on Television most, 30; 8% indicated that rely on public Meetings most, 20; 5% indicated that rely on posters most and 10; 3% indicated that rely on Loudspeakers most.

To determine the degree of public participation in county budgeting via social media, respondents were asked using *Likert Scale* to indicate the extent to which social media encourages them to participate in Kisii County governance issues like budgeting. The study found out that social media is a very useful tool in encouraging public participation in county budgeting. It encouraged majority of the respondents (250; 66%), to a very large extent to participate in county governance issues like budgeting, 110; 29% of the respondents are encouraged to a large extent, 8; 2% of the respondents are encouraged to a small extent, 7; 2% of the respondents are encouraged by a very small extent and only 5; 1% of the respondents are not encouraged to any extent to participate in county governance issues like budgeting by social media platforms.

Most Effective Social Media Platforms for Public Participation in County Budgeting.

The second objective of the study sought to identify the most effective social media platforms for public participation in Kisii County Government's budget preparation process by seeking to measure; degree of public preferences in the use of social media platforms for participation in county budgeting and the degree of public participation in county budgeting via each social media platform.

To determine the degree of public preferences in the use of social media platforms for participation in county budgeting, respondents were asked to select from the list provided the social media platform(s) which they prefer most in their day today communication endeavours. The study found out that most respondents (165; 43%) prefer Facebook most in their day today communication endeavours. This is followed closely by those who prefer WhatsApp (160; 42%) most. 33; 9% of the respondents prefer Twitter most. Instagram, Google+

and LinkedIn are preferred most by (3; 0.7%) respondents each. 13; 3.4% of the respondents indicated that they prefer a combination of Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter most. Therefore, Facebook and WhatsApp stood out to be most preferred platforms by the public. It is closely followed by WhatsApp. These platforms (Facebook and WhatsApp) have a wider public reach are thus the most effective platforms for the county government to engage the public in governance issues like budgeting .

In determining the degree of public participation in county budgeting via each social media platform, respondents were asked to select from the list provided the social media platform (s) that encourages them most to participate in county governance issues like budgeting. The study found out that, majority of the respondents (150; 39%) are encouraged most by Facebook to participate in county governance decisions like budgeting. This is followed closely by those who are encouraged most by WhatsApp. 25; 7% of the respondents are encouraged most by a combination of Facebook and WhatsApp .Only 15; 4% of the respondents are encouraged most by a combination of Facebook and Twitter to participate in county governance decisions like budgeting. Therefore, Facebook is the most convenient platform to the public for participation in county budgeting. It is closely followed by WhatsApp and then Twitter.

Social Media Use by the Public for Participation in County Budgeting.

The third objective of the study was to examine how social media is used by the public as a participatory platform in Kisii County Government's budget preparation process with reference to the indicators; public accessibility of social media platforms for participation in county budgeting, public accessibility of county budgeting information via social media platforms, public's frequency of social media use for participation in county budgeting and public accessibility devices used to access social media sites.

In determining the public accessibility of social media platforms for participation in county budgeting, respondents were asked to select from the list provided the social media platform (s) which they have active accounts in. The study found out that, most respondents (165; 43%) have active account in Facebook. This is followed closely by those who have active account in WhatsApp (160; 42%). 33; 9% of the respondents have active account in Twitter, 13; 3% have active account in Instagram, 6; 2% have active accounts in LinkedIn and only 3% of the respondents are active in Google+.

With regard to public accessibility of information related to county budgeting via social media platforms, respondents were asked to indicate whether they have ever sought county governance information using social media. The study found out that majority of the respondents (300; 79%) have used social media platforms to seek county governance information like budgeting and only 80; 21% of the respondents who have never used social media platforms in seeking governance information.

As for the public's frequency of social media use for participation in county budgeting, respondents were asked to select from the list underneath how often they seek county governance information like budgeting information via social media platforms. The study found out that most respondents (197; 52%) use social media platforms on daily basis to seek county governance information like budgeting. 112; 29% of the respondents use social media on weekly basis, 50; 13% of the respondents use social media on monthly basis and 21; 6% of the respondents use social media on Bi-monthly basis.

In determining the public accessibility of devices used to access social media sites, respondents were asked to select from the list provided the telecommunication devices they use to access social media sites or platforms. They were told to select more than one device if applicable. The study found out that most respondents (200;

53%) use Cell phones to access online platforms. 100; 26% of the respondents use both Cell phones and Office Computers, 40; 11% of the respondents use I-Pads/Tablets and 20; 5% of the respondents use both home and office computers.

Social Media Use by County Government for Budgeting.

The fourth objective of the study was to explore how social media is used by Kisii County Government as a participatory platform for the public in budget preparation process. To achieve this, respondents were asked questions in relation to the following indicators; availability of social media platforms in the county government for budgeting and frequency of social media use by county government for budgeting. To determine the availability of social media platforms in the county government for budgeting, respondents were asked to select from the list underneath the social media platforms via which they normally receive county governance information like budgeting. They were told to select more than one answer if applicable. The findings indicate that, most respondents (200; 53%) receive county governance information like budgeting via Facebook, 130; 34% via Twitter and 50; 13% via Web Blog.

To determine the frequency of social media use by the county government for budgeting, respondents were asked to select from list underneath how often they receive county governance information via its social media platforms. The study found out that most respondents (250; 66%) receive information related to county governance via social media platforms yearly, 110; 29% receive county governance information Bi-monthly and 20; 5% receive county governance information monthly. No communication on daily and weekly basis from the county government as far as governance decisions is concerned via the online platforms.

Conclusions

The study examined the effects of social media use in participatory budgeting in Kenya`s County governance, with a special focus on Kisii County.

The study concludes that social media is very effective in enhancing public participation and knowledge in county budgeting. As a participatory platform, social media is very effective in the dissemination of county budgeting information to the citizens since it is very reliable. Social media also encourages most citizens to participate in county budgeting to a very large extent. Mainstream media has significantly slowed down in terms of usage due to the growth of digital era as revealed in the study. Consequently, the citizens are embracing social media as a communication channel at a very fast rate.

The study also concludes that Facebook and WhatsApp are the most effective platforms for public participation in Kisii County government budget preparation process. Facebook is preferred by majority of the citizens in their day today communication endeavours and it encourages most citizens to participate in county governance issues like budgeting. It is closely followed by whatsApp.

The study further concludes that Majority of the citizens are aware of the efficacy of social media as a participatory instrument in county governance issues like budgeting. Thus they (citizens) are willing to engage the county government in key budgeting decisions via the social media platforms more often (on daily and weekly basis). The findings of the study again reveal that majority of the citizens usually access online platforms via mobile phones, especially smart phones.

The study finally concludes that the county government's use social platforms as participatory instruments for the public on matters related to governance like budgeting is limited and sporadic. Social media is thus untapped participatory instrument in Kisii County Governance.

Recommendations for Improvement of E-Participatory Budgeting in Kisii County Governance.

From the study findings, the following are the recommendations for improvement of e-participatory budgeting in Kisii County Governance.

Social Media Influence on Public Participation in County Budgeting.

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that Kisii County Government should endeavour to proactively use social media platforms in the budget preparation process so as to increase the level of public participation and knowledge.

Again, the County government should endeavour to integrate as well as align online participation with other offline communications in engaging the public in key governance decisions like budgeting since the public usually relies heavily on mainstream media in reinforcing their trust of social media messages.

Most Effective Social Media Platforms for Public Participation in County Budgeting.

In view of the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that Kisii County Government should engage the public in key budgeting decisions via Facebook and WhatsApp platforms since they are the most popular among the citizens.

Social Media Use by the Public for Participation in County Budgeting

From the study findings, the researcher recommends that Kisii County Government should engage the citizens via social media platforms on key budgeting decisions more often, preferably on a daily and weekly basis.

Kisii County Government should also facilitate access of smart phones by her citizens for easy accessibility of social media sites. Most people rely on smart phones to access these online sites since they are affordable as revealed in the findings of the study.

Social Media Use by the County Government for Budgeting.

Based on the study findings, the researcher recommends that Kisii County Government should engage the public on county governance issues like budgeting more often, preferably on daily and weekly basis since most citizens are also willing to do the same.

Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the study findings, the researcher recommends or suggests that the same study to be carried out in the neighbouring Counties.

A Study can also be carried out to examine the effects of social media use in Participatory Budgeting at the National government level.

The researcher further suggests that a study be carried out to investigate the challenges encountered by Kenya's county governments in using social media for Participatory Budgeting.

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