

The Use Of Information And Communication Technology, And Social Networking Sites In Political Governance Of East African Legislative Assembly Parliament

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Abstract: This research project was carried out to ascertain the use of Information and Communication Technologies and Social Networking Sites in political governance of East African Legislative Assembly Parliament. The research project was based on the conviction that in this era of globalization use of ICTs and SNS's are fundamentally important and will have tremendous impact on governance, leadership and legislation now and in the near future. The specific objective of this study was intended; a) To evaluate the use of Social Networking Sites in enhancing the political governance of East African Legislative assembly Parliament. The findings from the research showed that that all the respondents 100% were subscribed to social networking sites and used them from time to time. Additionally, the EALA parliamentarians had a disparity when it came to use of SNSs to interact with constituents, 73.3% of the respondents indicated that they have used SNSs to interact with constituents on matters affecting the community from time to time however 26.7% showed that they did not use Social Networking sites to interact with constituents. Lastly, the use of ICTs and SNSs by EALA has also made it possible for citizens to view Assembly proceedings in real time and hence where able to view their representatives in the course of carrying out their duties in the political arena. Lastly, the world is changing in a dynamic fashion SNS's are among the tools leading the transformation and it is about time Parliamentarians in Africa embrace SNS's as major tools in changing how leaders interact and remain accountable to their constituents a practice that's been a myth in Africa.

Index Terms: social networking sites, political governance, East African Legislative Assembly, Parliamentarians, information and Communication Technologies

1 INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites (SNS's) are a form of social media and since their introduction on the World Wide Web (www) millions of people have integrated them into their daily lives. In retrospect, Social networking was born one day in 1971 (1stwebdesigner, 2008), when the first email was sent between two computers sitting next to each other. The message said "qwertyuiop" today, a portion of the world population have undergone some level of basic ICT training and some run very active social networking sites despite the lack of training however they are able to upload photos, create online profiles and engage with other people cross great cultural and international boundaries. According to Inter-parliamentary Union Hansard report (2009) it revealed that legislators are almost all using email (93%), most have a web presence (83% have a personal website) and that a quarter are using social networking tools. Relatedly, a parallel report of Hansard (2010) revealed that when respondents were asked what digital tools they would like to see MPs using in order to improve communication. The overwhelming response to this question was tools that lead to direct engagement and communication with citizens and less 'broadcasting' from the center out. In the third world, more especially in the East African region the downside is that the typical digital MPs remains in broadcast mode as a result East African citizens become aware of information by traditional media and word of mouth. Social Networking Sites (SNS's) are a form of social media that connect people to each other and unlike traditional media they provide interactive tools for consumption and production of political governance. Facebook alone is reported to have over 1.23 billion active and growing users (Monday morning website, 2014) who are frequently interacting and engaging in a variety of ways. This said, (IPU-ASGP conference, 2012) revealed that the lack of information on SNS's though does not mean that the Parliamentarians are not interested in using them but look more at the "risks on their

reputation and public image; for many it represents a technological leap into the unknown that may feel unfamiliar". Meanwhile, Politics has no concrete definition but in its broadest sense, is the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live (Heywood, 2013) while governance is defined by the World Bank (2013) as a process – by which authority is conferred on rulers, by which they make the rules, and by which those rules are enforced and modified. Africa's political governance has improved since 2000, peaceful elections and women participation has increased and there is greater determination to fight corruption (African economic outlook, 2014). However challenges still exist, public protests have increased in recent years largely in countries undergoing democratic transition. For instance, people want jobs and better wages and are keeping a closer eye on their leaders more especially through digital media. In the world over, Parliaments are making strides in how they interact with citizens through various SNS's but by far still gaps exist and these have to continually be explored to inform the next generations. As Aristotle put it, "Man is by nature a political animal" and as politics and governance continually evolve so is the nature of new technologies which can be used to better political governance within the region of East Africa hence encouraging and strengthening parliamentarian and citizen interaction. The nature of this research is to evaluate the use of SNS's in political governance of East African legislative assembly parliament as well as make recommendations for its enhancement.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Networking Sites (SNS's)

In this research SNSs will refer to web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi - public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and

traverse their list of connections and Those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Informal conversation is probably one of the oldest methods of interaction between individuals however with the emergence of SNSs which are fast gaining popularity as informal means of communication people are fast embracing and appreciating this not so old concept. (Shrish Kumar, 2013) In other words SNSs have played a crucial role in bridging boundaries and crossing the seas and enabling people to communicate on a common platform. It has become a potential mean to relation building and staying in touch with all known. In this era, the popularity of SNSs is not only limited to ordinary people but as far as the higher echelons of power, governance and leadership EALA parliamentarian being no exception. Taking a closer look at the USA presidential campaigns of Barack Obama in 2008 will reveal the role of Social Media in his campaigns; he was the first presidential candidate to effectively make use of social media as a major campaign tool. In East Africa, Kenyan presidential elections of 2013 will be remembered as "Kenya's first digital campaign", Mr Uhuru and Mr Ruto run an election operation that led them to the nations state house on the back of a simple realization that social media platforms now play the same role as newspapers as the agenda setting media which generate for the much more widely available TV and radio platforms. The recent emergence of online social media has had a significant effect on the contemporary political landscape, yet our understanding of this remains less than complete. In East Africa the Mobile and internet numbers increase as days go by, for instance, Tanzania has over 27,395,650, Kenya 30,429,351, Uganda 18,300,000, Rwanda 6,039,615 and Burundi 2,995,000 million subscribers on mobile and Internet users estimates are 5,308,814 for Tanzania, Kenya 16,234,583, Uganda 4,800,000, Rwanda 903,964 and 157,000 for Burundi respectively across the East African Community partner states as estimated by lhub.com in there 2013 study. The numbers indicate a growing trend in the use of mobile and internet however a disparity on how Parliamentarians from the region can engage such a growing number still exists. Much has been made of the impact of social media on the modern political landscape. For enthusiasts, social networking tools such as Twitter, Facebook, MySpace and blogging and video platforms offer powerful new ways to connect, influence and engage fellow citizens – perhaps ushering in a radical transformation in the way citizens connect with and influence their government and politicians connect with the public (Grant, Moon and Grant, 2010)

3METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research methodology that was used to guide this particular research as well as to outline the appropriateness of each method in the course of this research.

Research Design

The research took the form of a case study design. According to Researcher Robert K. Yin, he defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not

clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1984, p. 23). Additionally, the researcher endeavored to use the methods below in collection of data on the use of Information and communication technologies and social networking sites in the political governance of EALA parliament. For instance, on the intervals they engage with ordinary citizens on governance issues.

The case study method

The researcher used this case study method to collect the necessary data and understand the behavioral patterns of the MPs in their use of ICTs and social networking sites for political governance. Additionally, the case study method enabled the researcher to investigate and collect data that is detailed and could provide a basis on which to make recommendations for enhancing political governance of the EALA parliament through use of ICTs and SNSs. The case study also involved East African Legislative assembly staffs who were on site at the time the researcher was carried out, these provided invaluable information on the workings and operations of the assembly

Target Population

The study will focus primarily on the East African legislative Assembly Parliamentarian who comprises nine elected members from each partner state. All in total they number forty five members. However 15 members will be used as the target population based on EALA committee constitution; relatedly the data collected from the respondents was dependent on who replied to the online and hard copy questionnaires. Also 10 staff that support with running of the daily activities were involved to provide insight on the operations of the East African legislative assembly.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

According to the statistics glossary website (1997) a sample is a group of units selected from a larger group (the population). By studying the sample it was hoped that the researcher would draw valid conclusions about the larger group. Tentatively the researcher employed a convenient sampling method, which involved a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher as well as timely replies on the online questionnaires. This was used because the EALA parliamentarians are always on the move and cost effective since the researcher would not be able to locate each and every EALA parliamentarian in their home country.

Data collection Methods

Both hard copy and online Questionnaires The research relied on both hard copy and online questionnaires. The online questionnaires were sent to all EALA MPs personal and office emails which are shown on the East African legislative assembly website. Those physically available at the Head quarter of the Assembly in Arusha were availed with a hard copy which was collected with the help of an officer of EALA. Google forms was used due to it being compatible A variety of online questionnaire software's such as wizehive, survey monkey and Google forms were considered however Google forms was preferred due to its being compatible with a majority of browsers and it also alleviated any biases by the researcher in data collection. Additionally the online questionnaire was sanctioned by the Assembly Clerk who is responsible of

informing the Parliamentarians on any businesses within the chambers.

Interviews and chatting

The researcher carried out interviews with some of the EALA parliamentarians and staff as well as used software applications available to the Parliamentarians for instance, through use of Viber, whatsapp, Google chat and yahoo messenger. Some of the software applications are downloadable to smart phones and some can be accessed online on any internet browser on uses.

Data collection procedures

The researcher sought the permission to carry out data collection at the East African Legislative Assembly premises through the offices of the Clerk to the assembly. The Clerk Mr Madette was approached with the final research proposal for consideration which he considered and forwarded to the deputy clerk Mr Obatre who then then contacted the researcher and they engaged on the topic and research sample, He also went ahead and issued the researcher permission to collect data on the premises of the assembly . Once the permission was granted the researcher was given a group of contact Personnel who would assist with the information gathering. The senior public relations officer informed the researcher when and what times the Parliamentarians had meetings at the Headquarters and liaised with the researcher to distribute the questionnaires when the assembly had travelled to partner states.

Data analysis and presentation

The researcher used IBM SPSS Version 22 software package in capturing and analyzing quantitative data collected from the questionnaire. This package will enable the researcher to present the data in an extensive way by generating corresponding tables, graphs and other relevant statistics. It was very useful to the researcher since it made tabulation of the information easy and produced very understandable final results of the data collected.

4 FINDINGS

Gender of Parliamentarian Respondents

The study included both male and female respondents to avoid sex bias that would have otherwise have exaggerated the findings of the study. During the study, 15 respondents were involved and Men happen to score a higher percentage compared to women as the table shows below.

Table 1 Gender of Respondents

Sex of Respondents	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	7	46.7	
Female	8	53.3	
Total	15	100.0	

Source: survey, 2015

The table above shows gender of the respondents who participated in the study, the study revealed that female respondents who participated was high with 53.3% and male

respondents' participation was at 46.7% an indication of the level of participation as well as a show of no bias to the genders in the study. Women's participation in leadership and governance has been steadily on the increase over the past couple of years especially in leadership and governance positions. Women EALA parliamentarians number 18 in the total number of EALA parliamentarians in the current assembly where as men are 27. In the past women EALA representatives numbered less than men however their representation in the house has steadily increased over time.

Table 2 Country of Origin

Country	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Uganda	4	26.7	26.7
Kenya	3	20.0	46.7
Tanzania	2	13.3	60.0
Burundi	1	6.7	66.7
Rwanda	5	33.3	100.0
Total	15	100.0	

Source: survey findings, 2015

The study included respondents from countries that make up the East African Community and these where, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda and Burundi. The table shows the country of origin distribution among the partner states in regards respondents to the study. According to the table above, 15 respondents were involved in the study and the findings indicate that Rwanda had a representation of 33.3%, Uganda had 26.7%, Kenya had 20.0%, Burundi and Tanzania had 6.7% and 13.3% respectively. The majority of the respondents who are from Rwanda indicate that the country representatives are very comfortable with use of ICTs and SNSs in their work. For instance, Rwandan government instituted an ambitious plan of providing public hotspots so that its citizens can have access to wifi thus making it easier for the citizens to be in contact with their political representatives. Additionally, there is good penetration of mobile services therefore enabling parliamentarians to contact their citizens through use of SMSs especially in regards mobilization for projects.

Table 4 where EALA Parliamentarians often use the Internet

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Office	3	20.0	20.0
Office and Home	12	80.0	100.0
Total	15	100.0	

Source: survey findings, 2015

The data collected revealed that EALA parliamentarians had a disparity in how they used the services of the internet, 80% of the respondents used internet both at office and home while only 20% used the services of the internet at office. Their responses show that ICTs and more especially the internet are used by the EALA members to communicate with citizens and efforts should be made to encourage the continued use by building the capacities of the EALA parliamentarians through

trainings and acquiring the necessary gadgets to support two way interactions with the citizens from the region.

Table 5 Subscription to Social networking sites

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	15	100.0	100.0

Source: survey findings, 2015

Additionally, the data collected from respondents also revealed that the 15 respondents 100% were subscribed to a good number of SNSs which were used for a number of reasons. Among which was communication with constituents, friends and family and also posting or uploading articles and other links to various foras of information for citizens.

Figure 1 Facebook page of EALA MP Charles Nyerere Makongoro



Source: survey findings, 2015

Table 6 Social Networking Sites (SNSs) Subscription

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
a,b,c	8	53.3	53.3
a,b,e,h	1	6.7	60.0
a,b,g	1	6.7	66.7
a,b,h	3	20.0	86.7
a,c	1	6.7	93.3
a,c,f	1	6.7	100.0
Total	15	100.0	

Key:

- a). Facebook b). whatsapp c). Twitter d). Hi5 e). LinkedIn f). YouTube g). Google + h). Instagram i). Friendster j). MySpace

Source: survey findings, 2015

The data above shows the SNSs subscription of the respondents, the data showed that the respondents were making use of multiple SNSs. This implies that the EALA parliamentarians are well connected on the social networking sites. Based on the key from the previous page, the highest

combination of SNSs subscribed to was (Facebook, Whatsapp and twitter) at 53.3%, (Facebook, Whatsapp, LinkedIn and Instagram) at 6.7%, (Facebook, Whatsapp and google+) at 6.7%, (Facebook, whatsapp and Instagram) at 20.0%, (Facebook and Twitter) at 6.7%, (Facebook, twitter and YouTube) at 6.7%. a good number of the social networking sites such as Facebook, twitter and whatsapp are very interactive and allow even for multiple users to connect in a single message thus making transfer of information easier.

Table 7 EALA MPs use of SNSs to interact

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	11	73.3	73.3
No	4	26.7	100.0
Total	15	100.0	

Source: survey findings, 2015

The data above shows the extent to which EALA parliamentarians use ICTS and SNSs to interact and engage their constituents on policy and legislative matters concerning the East African Community. 15 respondents gave feedback and 73% responded with a yes while 26.7 responded with No. As much as the Parliamentarians use the Social networking sites to communicate with citizens it's only when they want to but are under no obligation to do so or do they follow any guidelines when having the communications sent out. However, some active respondents have made good rapport with citizens and are constantly engaging them on the move.

Figure 2 Right Hon EALA speakers twitter Page

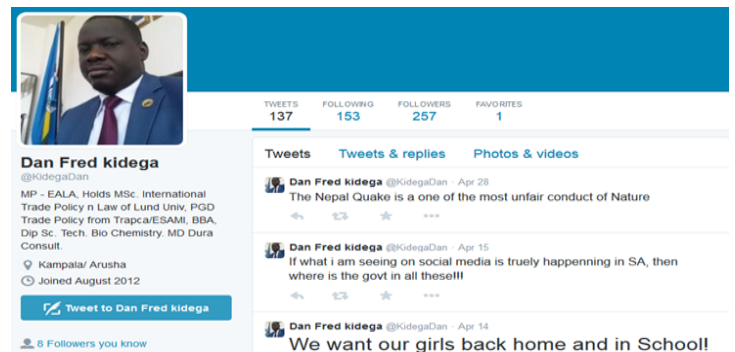


Figure 3 Hon Fred MukasaMbidde Facebook page



In the image above Honorable Fred MukasaMbidde an EALA Parliamentarian communicates to other citizens in the East African region about the recent xenophobic attacks by South African citizens on foreigners, through use of Social Networking Sites a great deal of citizens are able to receive and interact with the Parliamentarian about many regional issues that may affect East Africans. This is an indication of the various uses and forums that EALA parliamentarians use when interacting with citizens.

5 CONCLUSIONS

For too long, politicians, scientists, scholars and researchers have concentrated on economic issues within Africa but new thematic areas such as information, communication and technology, social networking sites are fast catching up on issues that will drive Africa out of the "dark information age". Relatedly, based on the findings the East African Legislative Assembly as an independent institution should endeavor to push for changes within its operations to allow for new mechanisms such as use of Social Networking Sites to be accepted for use in its business this will bridge the information gap between the institutions and its regional citizenry hence increasing the visibility of the regional institution amongst the citizens. The research found out that there a number of limitations to use of ICT and SNSs; for instance, the development of infrastructures to support growth and use of ICTs and SNSs Developing countries lack funds to invest in development of infrastructure mainly due to high level corruption and mismanagement of the available resources. Also the costs associated with upgrades to new ICT systems are very high and hence governments invest into other areas of the economy. EALA also lacks an information and communication strategy this coupled with a lack of reforms in the regional treaty to allow for social networking sites to be used in the business of the assembly. Despite the shortfalls, East African legislative assembly parliamentarians should prepare for a future assembly that is up to date with latest ICT infrastructures and is flexible in relaying important information to the citizens of the region this will support the growth of democratic governance of the region and improve the political accountability at a region level.

6 Recommendations

The world is becoming a global village interconnected by a wireless web and the physical and geographic boundaries are disappearing faster than ever. We are surrounded by innovations and rapid changes even the field of governance and leadership has not been left untouched. We come across these innovations from time to time and the sphere of social networking is one shining example amongst the many. In the developed world information is wealth and this wealth is greatly enhanced by the power of infrastructures that encourage connectivity and movement of information. However Africa and more especially the East African region a great disparity exist in coverage of Infrastructure to support a growing ICT generation. I recommend that EALA parliamentarians press their governments to invest in the development of infrastructure to improve the level of connectivity; information is one of the most expensive resources in this era. The regions development can be greatly enhanced by building infrastructure that support sharing of information across borders without people incurring heavy costs of movement for instance, development of a web portal

to support citizens to e-petition the assembly on various regional issues rather than incurring costs of transportation. Also with the development of ICTs people will be wired into the wireless regional village and will in the short and long term begin to appreciate the benefits of forming the East African Community. Furthermore, I recommend that EALA also puts time in coming up with an ICT and communications strategy that will greatly enhance its ability to take advantage of the benefits that accrue to the use of ICTs and Social networking platforms in this communication age. The benefits are immense however without a road map on how to tap into this arena all will be a lost battle, a great deal of the young generation in the region can be accessed through use of social networking sites and in my view the region needs to engage this booming generation to harmonise its vision with that of the youth. In other words the community and more especially EALA cannot be a people centred institution without building a bridge to communicate with its constituents. Also, EALA needs to discuss making revisions within the treaty forming the East African Community so as to include articles and phrases that encourage communication and use of information that is exchanged over online platforms amongst its citizens and their representatives. This will enhance the performance of EALA in performing its duties and also bring a large number of citizens on board with the integration agenda of the region. It is important to capture and integrate citizens input in the work of the assembly there by enabling its role and power in the build up to the integration of the East African region. Furthermore, I recommend that EALA continues to build on the capacity of its legislators in using some of the new upcoming SNSs so as to keep in touch with the growing trends of the social networking platforms commonly used by the citizens of the region. This can be done through continuous training of legislators and also providing them with devices such as laptops, Ipads and smartphones with pre-installed applications that support social networking platforms with ability to encourage interactive and two way communications between two parties. For instance, Facebook, twitter and whatsapp to mention but a few that are quiet interactive. Relatedly, EALA also needs to push for reforms within the partner states to deter the interference of their national governments in the running of social networking site unless it affects national security. For instance, currently Burundi is faced with many demonstrations by the people against the current president and in retaliation the government refused access by the citizens to social networking platforms which in return hindered information flow between citizens and their representatives consequently affecting both the leadership and governance structures that are dependent on the flow of information. Relatedly, also the East African Legislative assembly should invest in creation of an application that can easily be downloaded to smartphones, computer devices of both EALA representatives and citizens so as to foster and encourage two way interactions between citizens and their representatives. Additionally, this will make the archiving of information very easy since whatever is posted on the application site becomes property of the assembly, such an action would make governance of people much easier since interactions are guaranteed. Attacks by hackers onto the website of EALA and EAC should also be minimised by employment of competent personnel who are knowledgeable about different types of hacks and easily deter complex hacks to the website thus keeping the website functional and

running. This would make it easier for East African citizens to access information in a timely manner thus encouraging a participatory type of leadership that benefits the interests of the citizens in the region. Also EALA should invest in starting up a talk show held at the regional headquarters where citizens can be invited to attend and ask questions about regional issues, this can be aired live on national televisions across the region. This way citizens can engage with their parliamentarians not just in person by invitation but also across great boundary divides through the power of ICTs. In such cases, also social networking sites will be used to engage citizens and feedback given both live and online. Lastly, governments within the East African region should invest in powerful ICT infrastructures to bring about interconnectivity across borders of the five partner states. This will allow for citizens in the region to have equal access to and share information between not just the regional parliamentarians but also national parliamentarians and their citizens. a case in point is Rwanda with the "smart Kigali" project and in the United Kingdom where an e-petition online system was started these have facilitated governance and leadership by giving citizens access to their representatives virtually.

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