

**INFLUENCE OF TWITTER HASHTAGS ON THE  
FORMATION OF PUBLIC OPINION ON SOCIO-  
POLITICAL ISSUES IN KENYA**

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**Influence of twitter hashtags on the formation of public opinion on  
socio-political issues in Kenya**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the award of the Degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy in Mass Communication in the Jomo  
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## **DECLARATION**

This thesis is my own original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

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This thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my beloved children Alvin, Wendy and Aleisha for their relentless patience, love and prayers during the entire period of my studies.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>CAK</b>	Communication Authority of Kenya
<b>CDA</b>	Critical Discourse Analysis
<b>PC</b>	Participatory Communication
<b>SNS</b>	Social Networking Sites
<b>SM</b>	Social Media
<b>SMS</b>	Short Message Service
<b>USG</b>	User Generated Content
<b>BAKE</b>	Bloggers Association of Kenya
<b>KOT</b>	Kenyans on Twitter
<b>RT</b>	Retweet
<b>CMD</b>	Computer Mediated Discourse
<b>CMC</b>	Computer Mediated Communication

## **OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**Citizen Journalism:** practice where members of the public create and distribute news to the public and the media

**Discourse:** act of communication that involves the exchange of meaning in written or oral form in real communication events and contexts. Discourse in this study referred to online exchanges under a hashtag on Twitter

**Frame:** a communication structure that conceptualizes an issue through thought or communication

**Framing:** process of conceptualizing and contextualizing an issue in a way that makes individuals think or communicate about it in a certain way

**Gatekeeping:** the act of media practitioners controlling, monitoring and filtering news through the entire process so that only what they perceive to be safe or important reaches the audience.

**Gate-watching:** the practice of users of news content guarding, watching, reacting to and editing every step of the communication process

**Hashtag:** an in-text tag symbolized as # that is used by social media participants to identify topics and guide comments on Twitter

**Mentions:** messages in which a specific tweep is mentioned using the @sign and posted on the recipient's public page

**Opinion formation:** the moment when a group of people or community begins to have and express a feeling, belief or attitude towards an issue of societal and national importance

- Public Opinion:** a combination of views, attitudes, perspectives and beliefs held by a significantly large portion of a society about an important issue affecting them
- Issue Regime:** a period of time during which socio-political news story or event is so huge that it enjoys a large chunk of media attention and coverage
- Social Media:** all forms of digital media socialization platforms that allow users to interact online
- Social Networks:** internet-based websites that allow users to seek create and disseminate information within a bound system
- Text:** a spoken or written record of discourse that represents meaning in everyday life. A text in this study refers to the hashtag and all the comments that fall under it in Twitter conversations
- Trend:** popular topic in Twitter exchanges that can be identified within a particular time frame.
- Tweeps:** Twitter users, specifically, those who send tweets
- Tweet:** messages exchanged on Twitter
- Twitter:** a micro-blogging and messaging social media tool that is used for interpersonal, professional and academic communication
- Sociopolitical Issues:** Issues that affect social and political lives of Kenyans on a day to day basis
- Issues of National Importance:** Issues that affect a large number of citizens in Kenya

## **ABSTRACT**

Using hashtags, an in-text tag symbolized as #, has become a common feature in social media discourse globally. The study investigated the influence of the hashtag revolution on the formation of public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya. The study examined how the public is using Twitter to disseminate information on various social and political issues by incorporating hashtags in their tweets. The research focused on how hashtags are influencing public opinion formation in social and political issues among Kenyans through a discourse analysis of the Twitter conversations (tweets) and interviews. Hashtags in Kenya are formulated by ordinary citizens and other groups like bloggers and activists besides the media practitioners, to direct public debate on issues of national importance. The main objective of the research was to examine the influence of the hashtag revolution in Kenya on the formation of public opinion on socio-political issues. This study was guided by four specific objectives, which include: to establish the influence of the framing of the hashtag on the formation of public opinion, to explain the influence of the actors of the hashtag on formation of public opinion, to determine the influence of the context in which a hashtag is formed on the formation of public opinion and to find out the influence of the nature of the hashtag discourse on the formation of public opinion. The study was guided by two theories, the framing theory and the participatory communication theory. The study adopted the mixed method research design. The study population consisted of an indefinite number of hashtags generated by Kenyans in the period between January 2014 and March 2017, media practitioners from the local television stations and members of public involved in hashtag development. Purposive sampling was used to select Kenyans on Twitter and 35 hashtags, while snowball sampling was used to select two independent hashtag developers. Five television stations were investigated. A total of 22 journalists from the five stations involved in digital/online journalism were interviewed. The researcher also interviewed 4 independent hashtag developers and ten Kenyans on Twitter (KOT). Qualitative data for the research was collected through interviews and the streaming of tweets under the selected hashtags. Data from interviews was transcribed and organized using content analysis. Analysis and interpretation was done using critical discourse analysis. The quantitative and qualitative data mined from Twitter was coded using determined themes and organized using content analysis. Description and narration of the results was done. Findings indicated that the four independent variables, that is, framing, context, actors and nature of hashtag discourse had significant influence on the formation of public opinion on sociopolitical issues in Kenya. A regression analysis of the four variables was done and the results indicated that framing of a hashtag was the most influential variable in public opinion formation. The conclusion of the study was that framing, context, nature of discourse and the actors in the hashtag discourse influenced formation of public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya. A key finding of the study was that the Kenyans were using the hashtag as a form of discursive resistance where the ordinary citizens get to dialogue, diagnose problems, suggest solutions and even organize protests guided by a single hashtag. The research concluded that there is indeed a paradigm shift as far

as gatekeeping, agenda setting, priming and framing of news is concerned with the ordinary citizen taking up this traditional role of the media by creating, disseminating and gatewatching news in online platforms. The media have adopted the use of hashtags to keep up with citizens online in almost all TV programmes. The online community has become a major source of news for the media. For media practitioners and policy makers, the study recommends that hashtags continue being used as a genre of communication as they appeal to the public and formulators should emphasize more the framing of the hashtag.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

The world has witnessed an unprecedented growth of the global information society in the last few decades. This information society relies heavily on information to survive (Norris, 2001). The information is transmitted mostly through the mass media, both traditional and modern. Media play an important role in keeping societies informed and in turn stabilize them in all areas, whether political, social, cultural, economic or technological.

Through the use of mass media the public gains knowledge of events and issues that enable them to form their own opinions or support those of others. Mass media can therefore be viewed as the avenues through which the public replicates, follows and accumulates opinions and decisions via the information provided. This is affirmed by Megha (2014) who describes the media as ‘mirrors’ and ‘moulders’ of public opinion. They are the mirror because people can look at their society through media. It is through the media, that the nation’s schema is set where the public is made to focus on crucial issues that the media chooses (moulding public opinion). People do not only obtain information about public matters from the news media but they also pick up how much prominence or priority to assign to a subject on the basis of the highlighting done on it in the news (Megha, 2014). This relates to the concepts of priming and agenda setting in mass communication research.

The emergence of the Internet changed the field of mass communication. This was especially felt at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when social media came to existence. According to Gaur (2014), the use of social media for socialization and news dissemination in different parts of the world has proved effective and the media have become a powerful tool of influence. Social media, henceforth SM, have brought a lot of benefits but also complicated issues in the communication arena. For instance, countries have faced political unrest caused by negative political activism, an

increase in cybercrimes, lack of innovation among the youth due to too much dependency on the internet and general social immorality. Social media have been used to bring down governments and effect change in some regions. In the military and security sectors the use of SM platforms has brought a lot of logistical challenges as the secrecy code is sometimes blown up when high secret information finds its way into social media. In Kenya for example, the government was forced to respond to social media propaganda peddled by Al Shabaab terrorists on Twitter about how the terrorists were killing soldiers, through the military spokesman, after sending its troupes to Somalia in 2010. Another example is the Arab Spring of 2011 that was characterized by revolutions and coups in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia that were propagated and escalated through Twitter. Another major concern is WikiLeaks, a web-based site that gives governance and diplomatic secrets online and continues to cause major shifts in foreign policy across the world. It almost destroyed Kenya and USA ties after leaking information on the spying of the Kenyan executive by USA agencies in 2014. The use of WhatsApp caused a major bank, Chase Bank, to be placed under receivership in Kenya after a message was posted on the site causing people to withdraw cash all at once. The bank could not cope with the withdrawals and it went under on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2016. This led to the arrest of Kenyans sending alarming messages on different banks' stability in Kenya.

The use of social media in Kenya has been on the rise since 2007. The number of internet users in Kenya has especially grown due to high mobile phone transcription. According to the ICT report 2014 the most commonly used social media in Kenya are Twitter (2.1 million users) and Facebook (4.3 million users) and LinkedIn (1 million users). There was a rapid growth in the subscriptions in 2016. The State of the Internet Report in Kenya (BAKE, 2016) indicates that 6.1M Kenyans use Facebook, 2.2M use Twitter, 3M use Instagram, 1.5M use LinkedIn and 350,000 on Google+. Others like Instagram and Snapchat are coming up very fast globally. Kenyans are quickly embracing Instagram though it is still not used for official purposes. Most people especially the youth use it to share photos and to socialize. It is however slowly getting adopted by some media houses like Citizen TV to connect

with viewers. WhatsApp has approximately 10M users and is a powerful tool of mobilization in Kenya today. It is a tool that is easily accessed on the mobile phones and most Kenyans use it to pass information including breaking news to the people in their contact list.

The present study is on the influence of Twitter hashtags on formation of public opinion in the Kenyan context. As a social network, Twitter was developed in 2006 by Jack Dorsey (Twitter.com). Twitter is characterized by the use of the hashtag symbol, #, to identify a tweet's topical key word or phrase and it has been variously used around the world for social and political mobilization. The # convention in Twitter is used to encourage users to focus around specific topics (Jungherr, 2015). Shapp (2014) states that the most common usage of hashtag in a variety of programming languages in computers is a mark for comments where it is used as a marker for metadata which means data about data. The etymology of the lexical form 'hashtag' is 'hash' from the symbol # and 'tag' from the usual lexical meaning of tagging information so as to organize it (Shapp, 2014). Clicking on this hashtag will bring out all public tweets that include the same string of characters.

Twitter allows users to post messages of 140 characters or less (equivalent to eleven words per post) to the general public or to a set of users who subscribe to the users message stream otherwise known as "followers". These micro posts are referred to as "tweets" (Zappavigna, 2012). However the number of characters was reviewed in 2017 to allow posting of information under 280 characters in selected user accounts. The content posted on Twitter by users is open to the public and is searchable unless the user decides to change his/her privacy settings. All Twitter users are able to follow as many people as they want online. The tweets from those they follow show up on their 'feeds' on their Twitter home page. According to Twitter.com half a billion tweets are posted on the platform on a daily basis, 76% of users being on mobile phones. Twitter services are available in 35 languages. In April 2018, Twitter recognized Kiswahili as one of its languages thanks to the growing number of tweeps in East Africa posting in Kiswahili.

All messages of interest on Twitter can be traced using the hashtag. The # is used to label a topic and it guides all users in directing their tweets. The tags then created may include a word, initials, clause, phrase or a whole sentence as in #Corruption, #WCW, #StateOfCorruptionKe, #HaveItAll and #IStandWithJanetKanini. Zappavigna (2012) defines a hashtag as an in-text tagging that is visible within the body of a tweet. In a tweet, anything that is typed after the # symbol until the next white space becomes a clickable hashtag. The hashtag arose out of community use and later it was incorporated into Twitter's search interface.

Zappavigna (2017) explains that hashtags emerged as part of micro blogging. That is the process of publishing short character-constrained posts to ambient audiences. With time the hashtag spread to other SM and mediated contexts such as marketing communication, advertising and television. Hashtags are a part of social metadata that involves the creation of user generated tags that emerge over time within an online community. Vande (2007) refers to this process of hashtag creation and use as folksonomy that is in contrast with taxonomy done by professionals in different fields. The reference of hashtags as metadata is about hashtags being more than just tools for information management and going further into the service of interpersonal social relations. Hashtags are created by professionals and non-professionals for commercial, official or entertainment purposes. One can register a hashtag on Hashtags.org or Twubs.com so as to gain copyright. SM sites that support hashtags include Twitter, Facebook, You Tube, Google+, GAWKER, Flickr, #Waywire, Instagram, Fetchnotes, TOUT, Pinterest, Friendfeed, Kickstarter, Tumblr and Orkut. The research however is limited to the analysis of hashtag use on Twitter by Kenyans for opinion formation which is a fairly recent phenomenon.

According to a study by Gazzar (2013), public opinion is defined as an aggregate of individual views, attitudes and beliefs about a particular topic expressed by a significant portion of a given community. This can be about politics, culture, literature, art, fashion and a myriad of other social issues. Gazzar (2013) outlines four conditions that a phenomenon must have for it to count as public opinion; there must be an issue; there must be a significant number of individuals who express

opinions on the issue; there must be some kind of consensus among at least some of these opinions; and this consensus must directly or indirectly exert influence. To understand public opinion, one must find out the motivations behind all these aspects. Public opinion is influenced by factors like the environment, mass media, interest groups, labour unions or organizations, opinion leaders and other more complex influences.

In the Kenyan context, public opinion is made evident through various forms of activism through fora like human rights organizations, civil rights groups, lobby groups, trade unions, mainstream media debates, workers' protests and lately, social media where people in different online fora converge under loose relationships to debate various political, social, economic and cultural issues. There are also groups on social media that tackle specific issues and direct public opinion. Lately, these groups have been creating hashtags on various issues of national importance to create awareness, publicity and protest. A good example is a group called PAWA 254 that deals with enlightening Kenyans on political, economic and social rights and generally encourages citizens to use the democratic space provided by the constitution and express their opinions through mass media. Relevant to this research is an anonymous group called #KOT (Kenyans On Twitter) which has been involved in formulation of twitter handles and hashtags to mobilize Kenyans for national debate on issues affecting the nation or a sensitive socio-political event.

The current trend in Kenya is the use of social media including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, by the main media houses to encourage interactivity and public participation during news dissemination as well as during other programs such as entertainment, education, public debates, political interviews and social issues in both radio and television. Media houses in Kenya usually display the hashtag of choice as well as Facebook and Instagram addresses during a program. The public is also encouraged to send SMS through particular numbers or call in live to participate. For instance, Citizen TV has hashtags before news in both Kiswahili and English languages, such as *#NipasheWikendi* and *#NewsAt9*. KTN uses one hashtag to interact with viewers during news, that is, *#GetTheWholeStory*. Other programs

with hashtags include *#TheTrend* or *#TTTT*, in NTV, *#E-NTERACTION* in K24 and *#OpinionCourt* in Citizen TV. The hashtags are an invitation to the public to participate in the news and entertainment programs through Twitter. Media convergence means that what people listen to on radio or watch on television can also be accessed online, just like newspapers can be read online. The responses from the audience can be read on Facebook on the station's walls despite the fact that the # is a Twitter symbol.

This interactivity between the modern media, specifically, SNS and mainstream media, and how this has impacted on the formation of public opinion in Kenya is the focus of this research. The study looked at social media, specifically Twitter hashtag use, and the influence it has on the public opinion formation on social and political issues in the country. The study focused on hashtag use in Twitter because that is where the hashtag originated and all tweets are anchored on it unlike other platforms which may or may not use it. The current trend can be viewed as a revolution or paradigm shift where there is evidently a shift in digital democracy and especially in relation to public participation in news creation and dissemination in Kenya.

A hashtag is described as a form of indexed post indicated by the # symbol used on Twitter (Grant, 2015). According to Morstatter, et al (2013), a hashtag is an important communication tool on Twitter used by users to annotate the content they produce and interact with other users on the same platform. In a way, adding a hashtag to a tweet is equivalent to accepting being a member of a certain online community, usually united by a topic. Twitter uses hashtags to identify the trending topics of the day. The most notable use of SM on TV was during the July 2016 Obama visit to Kenya when Citizen TV used a live platform that they called *The Social Square*. The platform allowed debate on what was trending online, public views, opinions and expectations on the Obama visit. In using SM, the mainstream media encourages a public debate on the issue of the day. The use of diverse media has meant more reach for media practitioners and a more informed public. The public not only gains more information as presented by the media but is also more aggressive in seeking it.

This study investigated how the use of hashtags has influenced citizens and leaders' opinion in Kenya's political and social landscape. It sought to investigate the extent of citizen participation in not only the receiving of news but its creation as well. Citizens all over the world are beginning to talk about issues that affect them through the social media (Dijk, 2013). One way they do this is creating hashtags that are issue-based and which sometimes have featured in mainstream media. This phenomenon of citizens coming with news pieces through hashtags and the media doing the same as they engage the audience is the subject of this study.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Social media tools have been increasingly used to shape political opinion especially during elections. This is done through Facebook, Twitter and other SM platforms (Michaelson 2011; Makinen & Kuira, 2008). Kenya as a country has embraced the use of ICT and has a large population connected to the internet through Faiba network and the mobile phone network companies in the country. In the Third Quarter Sector Statistics Report for the Financial Year 2017/2018 of 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> March period by Communication Authority of Kenya and based on a total population of 46.6 million people, mobile phone subscription stood at 44.119 million with a penetration of 95.1%. Internet subscriptions hit 36.095 million meaning a penetration of 77.45%. This indicates that a large portion of the population can access internet through the mobile phone. The difference in the number of mobile and internet subscribers is because not all Kenyans who own mobile phones have Internet enabled phones.

Lately, Kenyans on Twitter (KOT) have been formulating hashtags to tackle emerging issues fast, passing information to members of the public sometimes before the mainstream media. Usually the hashtags are created in reaction to issues of national importance. This trend of engaging in online discourse through hashtag formation has led to a paradigm shift in that the mainstream media is also forming hashtags to seek audience with the public and engage them in debate. This is a new adaptation and a shift towards digital democracy and citizen participation that needs

to be investigated in order to establish the influence that the hashtags being formulated have on public opinion formation. It becomes even more important when social and political effects of some hashtags formed in the past are considered. For instance, the fact that the public can force government action through the media or make hasty policy decisions because of a hashtag.

Studies on hashtag use and influence have mainly been in other parts of the world and have been based on political mobilization and revolts (Storck, 2011; Michaelson, 2011; Meghar 2014). Other scholars like Sherice, Gearhart and Kang (2015), looked at the influences of comments in the social network sites on quality and credibility of journalism during news. Valenzuela (2013) examined the use of social media in general in enhancing political participation and activism. Most studies done on opinion formation have looked at political issues, specifically, media framing or setting the agenda for the public so that the audience is given what to pick and evaluate (Gearhart & Zhang, 2013; Choi, 2014; Gazza, 2013).

The current study focused on the formation of the Twitter hashtags by the media and by the public on the other hand. This is a new trend in framing and agenda setting. This is viewed as a paradigm shift since the media have always set the agenda for the public in news dissemination. The Kenyan hashtags have been on political, social, cultural and even economic aspects. All these hashtags elicited national debate and in all the cases there was a response from the government and media houses. The current study addressed this by investigating the role of the context in which these hashtags are formed on public opinion formation. The study sought to answer the questions: how are these hashtags formulated? Who formulates them? In which circumstances are they formulated (framed)? What is their linguistic structure? Who responds to them? What kind of messages that elicit the most responses? What kind of discourse takes place online? It is necessary to examine whether the public is taking over the role of framing issues for the media through citizen journalism and if so, how it does that through the hashtag. An examination of whether the roles are reversed or shared is crucial. The study also investigated the patterns of the discourse

in terms of how the hashtags activate participation and for what duration. This new phenomenon by Kenya's online community is what the research addressed.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

#### **1.3.1 General Objective**

The general objective of the study was to examine the influence of the hashtag revolution on the formation of public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya.

#### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To establish the influence of framing of a hashtag on the formation of public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya.
2. To assess the influence of actors in hashtag discourse on the formation of public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya.
3. To determine the influence of the context in which a hashtag is formed on public opinion formation on sociopolitical issues in Kenya.
4. To investigate the influence of the nature of the hashtag discourse on the formation of public opinion in socio-political issues in Kenya.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the influence of framing of a hashtag on the formation of public opinion on sociopolitical issues in Kenya?
2. What is the influence of actors in hashtag discourse on the formation of public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya?
3. What is the influence of the context in which a hashtag is formed on the formation of public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya?
4. What is the influence of the nature of hashtag discourse on the formation of public opinion on sociopolitical issues in Kenya?

## **1.5 Research Hypotheses**

$H_{01}$ : Framing of the hashtag does not have an influence on public opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya.

$H_{02}$ : Hashtag actors do not have an influence on public opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya.

$H_{03}$ : Hashtag context does not have an influence on public opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya.

$H_{04}$ : Nature of hashtag discourse does not have an influence on public opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study was done in a changing media environment in terms of the interactivity between media and the public, specifically how mainstream media and the public itself has been formulating hashtags online. This is a new development that signifies a paradigm shift and needs investigation. It also served the purpose of providing vital information to media stakeholders and government agencies as well as adding new ideas to the discipline of mass communication.

The Kenyan public is increasingly becoming active in seeking and using information and a single television channel is not enough for them. It is important to find out if public engagement during news dissemination adds any value to the media practitioners. Hashtags can originate from the public or the media. The media have always framed messages for the public or audience in general. Hashtags present a new phenomenon where the public is also involved in the framing and consumption of the message (discursive practice in this research). This interdiscursivity is something that should be investigated so as to get deeper understanding of social media discourse. A critical discourse analysis of the hashtag conversations brings to light the role of language in framing issues that affect everyday life and the interaction between discourse and the issues that affect people's lives. That it is only through the production and dissemination of texts that ideologies are propagated or opposed.

Studies on online opinion formation are also focused on digital democracy. Kaschesky, Pawel and Guilliame (2011) argue that the democratization of web publishing has led to the explosion of the number of opinions expressed over the Internet. Thus, citizens are becoming more actively engaged in decision making and debate on policy issues, are more empowered and have become more demanding in their relations with traditional institutions. This study, looked at how people form opinions and this will help understand the Kenyan citizen's place in policy issues and also shed light on digital democratic space in Kenya.

Media framing theory is based on the argument that the media not only decides what people focus on in the news but also how to think about it. This study looked at the possibility of the Kenyan public framing messages that in the end become news items for the media thus reversing the role of the media being agenda setters and framers. This would basically amount to a paradigm shift.

New media especially the use of the Internet has become the central way of communicating in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It not only speeds communication but it also makes possible the creation of new forms of communities or social groupings outside the usual communicative fields and events. This is something that needs to be studied more especially in developing African countries where access and skills for computer mediated communication are still believed to be limited.

Social media provide the largest, richest and definitely the most dynamic form of human interaction through real time communication. This not only helps to make clear the behaviour of groups and society but can be an opportunity to reach out to them in areas such as business and service industry including medicine. People in different fields may use SM and hashtags in marketing. Social media have been used in many developed countries to measure product awareness and do sentimental analysis on the same. Understanding the hashtags, which is a major feature in many of these efforts, is therefore important not just to communicators but to other industry players like mobile phone companies such as Safaricom, banks and tour companies in Kenya.

The results of the study would be beneficial to industry players especially those interested in influential marketing. Kenyan businesses from construction to consumer products to baking and tourism have moved online. Advertisements are done using social media and hashtags are increasingly being used to advertise products globally as in the case of #McDonaldStories and locally as used by Safaricom in adverts like #HaveItAll while creating public product awareness for Internet services. Stakeholders likely to benefit from this study, therefore, include academicians in media and communication studies, journalists, business practitioners, government communication officers and politicians and the citizens in general who may now understand this genre and its sociopolitical role better.

### **1.7 Scope of the Study**

The current study was on the influence of Twitter hashtags as one of the many media platforms that are currently used by the media practitioners and the general public for information dissemination, reception and entertainment. The social network uses the hashtag to tie discussions to one issue in a given time span. Twitter was chosen because the use of hashtags and the ‘@’ symbol is a feature of Twitter discourse and guides debates on Twitter. Other social media platforms can choose not to use the ‘@’ or # symbols (Zappavigna 2012). The influence of hashtags was investigated as used both by television journalists though when an issue arises the hashtag is used in both radio and television but investigating both media would generate huge amounts of data. Only hashtags that came up during issue regimes were sampled. The study employed a mixed methods design where qualitative and quantitative method of analysis on the data. Data collection was restricted to Twitter under sampled hashtags using Twitter software to mine it. The study was cross sectional focusing on the issue of using hashtag in Kenya between 2014 and 2017. Interviews were conducted on journalists, bloggers and university students in media or computer studies.

Television stations in Kenya are over one hundred including pay and free to air stations and licenses continue to be given to different entrepreneurs. Data generated from investigating all of them may be too much, therefore the study focused on a few

purposively selected TV channels. Leading English and Kiswahili stations were selected, namely, NTV, KTN, KBC, K24, QTV and Citizen TV. This was based on statistics from the Communication Authority of Kenya on the viewership ratings of TV stations. The selected stations had wider viewership (Communication Authority of Kenya, 2016). The study also analyzed hashtags generated by Kenyan citizens either independently or in response to the hashtags created by the media fraternity and independent bloggers. This was informed by one of the objectives of the study, that is, to investigate how the actors in a hashtag conversation influence the formation of public opinion.

The study was confined to Kenya geographically and this was ensured using Twitter trends.com that is able to geolocate hashtags. Only hashtags generated by Kenyans about Kenyan sociopolitical issues were investigated by the researcher. Literature review included general social media research, literature on framing, context, discourse and discourse analysis, opinion formation research and hashtags use in Kenya and other areas around the world.

Language use and opinion formation are inseparable (Stillar, 1998). The way a tweet is framed may have a role in determining how people react to it. The study examined the nature of discourse on the walls and the lexical choice during the formulation of the hashtags. The framing of the hashtag was investigated so as to determine if this influences their popularity and how this influences opinion formation. At the language level analysis was confined description of words and phrases as well as sentences where applicable.

The research also investigated the responses participants in the Twitter discourse and the number of mentions or comments each makes on the hashtag. Only hashtags that had lasted for three days or more and had been featured in the selected television stations during news or other programmes were investigated. This was due to the fact that for an issue to influence public opinion it must have some duration of continuous debate. Hashtags are formulated daily even hourly but not all get to a level of national attention. The research only looked at hashtags that had caused a national

debate on the issue at hand. All the hashtags sampled for the research were discussed by mainstream media.

The study used two theories: media framing theory and participatory communication theory. These two theories were used to show how hashtags are framed and contextualized by various actors and how the citizen journalism is taking root in Kenya especially with online participation of news creation and dissemination.

### **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

The study faced a few limitations. One, the study only investigated the use of hashtags in one social media platform, Twitter. This is a limitation in the sense that there are other social media using the hashtag symbol, #. The topics under discussion in Twitter find their way into other sites especially Facebook and WhatsApp. For instance, a hashtag like #LipaKamaTender was in both Facebook and Twitter. This was mitigated by specifying that the study was on the use of hashtags in Twitter among Kenyans since the data that would be generated from all those social media sites would be too much for any in-depth analysis.

Another limitation was that the amount of data generated from the socio-political hashtags was immense. This was addressed by limiting the number of hashtags for study to only those with a minimum of 10,000 mentions or tweets and had featured on national television stations.

The third limitation was that it was not easy to trace the hashtag to the original creator in some cases especially those created by ordinary citizens. Most social media users use fake names so as to remain anonymous. The researcher addressed this challenge by sampling even hashtags that were not showing source since they were trending nationally and had to be included in the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a detailed review of literature on the influence of Twitter hashtags use. The study sought to find out the influence of hashtag on the formation of public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya. The current study sought to meet the following objectives: to establish the influence of the framing of the hashtag on the formation of public opinion; to explain the influence of hashtag actors of the hashtag on the formation of public opinion; to

influence of the hashtag context in which a hashtag on the formation on public opinion; and, to find out the influence of the nature of the hashtag discourse on the formation of public opinion. An overview of literature concerning social media use and influence as well as the studies done in the area, are discussed under the empirical review. This chapter comprises of the theoretical framework, conceptual framework, review of the dependent and independent variables, empirical review, a critique of existing literature, research gaps identified by the researcher and a summary of key issues.

#### **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

Recent studies on social media have been on how audiences use the social network sites to mobilize, express opinions, activism and generally tackle different social and political issues. The study took a multiperspectival approach that involved two theories: the Media framing theory and the participatory communication/public journalism theory. Formulation of hashtags was examined using the framing theory while the aspects of citizen participation in the hashtag discourse and the social effects of the hashtag revolution were addressed through the participatory communication theory.

### **2.2.1 Media Framing Theory**

The framing theory authored by Entman (1993) is a communication theory which holds that the media decide what people think about by framing issues in a particular way. Conceptually, framing borrows from different theories such as attribution theory by Fritz Heider, 1958; Frame analysis theory by Goffman, 1974; and cognitive science theories formulated by Lakoff and Johnson, 1980 and 1999 respectively, as explained by Jensen (2012). Agenda setting and framing are interrelated though in practice they are different. Framing can be viewed as the second level of agenda setting as suggested by McCombs (2004). Agenda setting influences ‘what’ we think about while framing influences ‘how’ we think about it. Power is an important aspect of framing. Different frames represent and serve different power interests. Jensen (2012) explains the difference between agenda setting and framing in relation to effect on one’s mental state. He argues that agenda setting produces a temporary set of activities while framing represents a more permanent orientation or disposition. Frames are mental and social categories that show the outcome of both interpretation and interaction. Frames can therefore help us to see how media and society are coupled in communication.

Baran and Davis (2009), state that the framing theory examines how media focus attention on certain issues or events and place them within a field of meaning where people make sense of them. The issues are everyday occurrences. In this case, the media practitioners select topics that they want the public to think about basically setting the agenda for them. As they set the issue of the day they also influence public thinking by presenting the issue in a particular way (framing) so that eventually people will look at the issue the way the media prefer.

In this theory, a frame is the way media practitioners and gatekeepers package and present an issue to their audience. The frames presented determine how an audience interprets the issue of the day. The framing theory looks at frames as abstract notions that serve to organize meanings in a communication event. Frames influence audience’s perception and therefore it is not just about what to think about but how to

think about it. Thus, the media have the ability, according to the theory, to persuade the audience to accept or prefer one concept over another through framing of messages (Baran & Davis, 2009).

Jensen (2012) explains that a frame is a result of taking an item of information, packaging it in a particular way and placing it in some context. These frames are both mental and social. They are mental because they rely on interpretation and social because they emanate from people's interaction with others and their environment. A frame represents a more permanent orientation or disposition on a message compared to agenda-setting that is basically temporary in practice. Frames connect media and society in communication.

Entman (1993), the proponent of the theory, explains that to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicative text such that a particular problem, definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, recommendation and treatment is promoted. This means that frames are derived from real or perceived issues within the larger societal system.

Frames can also be described as structures that draw boundaries, set up categories, define some ideas out and others in and put together all related ideas in the final version of a communicative piece as explained by Resse (2007). This is the same view held by Severin and Tankard (2010) who define a frame as a central organizing idea for news content that is contextualized and suggests what issue is to be given prominence through selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration.

Entman (1993) states that media frames perform four key functions in a communicative event: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgment and suggesting remedies. These functions can be identified in the text. Traditionally, the framing theory explains how the media form frames on the news for the public thus setting the agenda. Thus, it gives the media prominence in terms of deciding the content that the audience consumes. The current study sought to prove through online research that the public can also set the agenda by coming up with news items through Twitter hashtags. Thus the focus of the study was to find

out if framing of hashtags is done by the public and the media concurrently or apart when it comes to online agenda. The hashtags were examined in terms of the source and this may show that framing may not necessarily be made by the media. This is more the case during an ‘issue regime’, which refers to a period during which a news story is so huge that it takes a large chunk of media coverage and public attention. The hashtags under investigation were those that come up during issue regimes.

The framing theory helped to investigate how the hashtags under investigation were framed and whether framing influences the opinion formed by the publics on the same. These frames were investigated in terms of who does it and how. The focus was thus the source of the hashtag and the aspects of framing related to language choice, code choice, grammatical structure and word choice in forming the hashtag and how all this influences the formation of opinions.

### **2.2.2 Theory of Participatory Communication**

This study was also supported by the theory of participatory communication in the communication process under which we have public journalism and citizen journalism. The participatory communication theory is premised on the ideas of Paulo Freire, an educationist, who expressed his thoughts on participatory dialogue in his classical work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The ideas of dialogue, voice and liberating pedagogy of the masses were conceived in the 1950’s but Paulo Frere’s book was published first in Portuguese in 1968 and then in English in 1970. This theory falls in the critical thoughts tradition and borrows a lot from the thoughts of Karl Marx. The current study examined the flow of information from the online community to the other users online, to the news media practitioners and to the government agencies. This is a new trend that involves not only citizen journalism (through blogs and general news reportage) but also a new way of the public creating news and the same affecting policy decisions by both mainstream media houses and government. To explain this new phenomenon the theory of participatory communication was employed. The focus was on how the Kenyan public is participating in news creation, exchange and dissemination.

According to Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009), the theory of participatory communication (PC) is associated with Paulo Freire in the 1950's, when he advocated for the empowerment of landless peasants in North Eastern Brazil in an adult literacy campaign he initiated. His idea was for the peasants to formulate their own demands for a better life and articulate that through dialogical communication. The emphasis in his ideology was on participatory and collective processes in research, problem identification, decision making, implementation and evaluation for change. From the 1960's onwards the theory begun to take root as a model of liberating pedagogy that supported globalization, transnational networking, new media and governance. PC emphasizes media that allow more dialogue such as community media. These media are seen as catalysts for mobilization and can be change themselves (Tufte & Mefalopuos 2009). A participatory communication strategy offers perspectives on how to articulate social processes decision making and change. Hashtags formulation and use on the Twitter platform is an example of this kind of medium that allows community dialogue and participation.

Servaes, Jacobson and White (2002), contend that the term citizen participation is used to refer to a number of social planning processes occurring in many different places and in many contexts. The participatory process emphasizes the importance of cultural identity of local communities and of democratization and participation at all levels, that is, international, national, local and individual. It points to a strategy that is inclusive, and largely emanates from traditional receivers. This can be referred to as the right of all people to individually and collectively speak their mind. The supporters of this theory emphasize that the masses have power to develop themselves and their environment. This involves the liberation and transformation of their societies. Thus, the theory directly addresses power, in all its forms, and its distribution in the society.

There are two major approaches to participation theory. The Paul Freire view and the UNESCO view of 1977. The Freire view proposes a dialogical approach to communication where all people especially the subjugated groups are given equal rights and opportunities to participate in any political process. The focus of this view

however is on group communication and the media and the language of use in the communication process is not given attention. On the other hand, the approach advanced by the UNESCO conference in Belgrade Yugoslavia in 1977 looked at public participation using three aspects; access, participation and self-management. The concept of access addressed the use of media for public use where the opportunities are availed to the public to choose varied and relevant programs and to have a means of feedback to transmit its reactions and demands to organizations. Participation in this case implied a high level of public involvement in the production and planning of communication systems. Self-management is the most advanced form of participation. The public exercise the power of decision-making within communication enterprises like media stations and the press and are also fully involved in the formulation of communication policies and plans. These ideas are widely accepted as a normative theory of communication involving people participation (Servaes, Jacobson & White, 2002).

PC theory is based on four tenets: *Dialogue*- refers to an encounter between men that allows problem recognition in social, economic or legal issues such as societal injustice or inequality; *voice*- the theory argues that the marginalized in the society should be given a voice and the time and space to articulate their concerns, define their problems, formulate solutions and act on them; *Liberating Pedagogy*- all dialogue should be action- oriented and awareness raising so as to be liberating; and finally, *action-reflection-action*- participatory communication is action oriented. The empowerment process is based on reflection on problems and eventually action.

The PC theory has kept growing in perspective and application especially since the 1960's (Rogers, 1962) and the 1970's. It has acquired different names including 'alternative media' that basically refers to grassroots media that runs parallel to 'mainstream media'; 'radical media' coined in 1984 by John Downing; and 'citizen media' coined in 2001 by Clemencia Rodriguez (Tufte & Megalopulos, 2009). This theory has many variations depending on the area of practice, including, community development, development communication or mass communication.

According to Peisker (2011), the participatory paradigm of development and communication studies evolved from dependency theorists who were looking for new ways to develop. It was presented as a bottom-up approach that viewed citizen participation as crucial and that people understand their realities much better than any experts and can become drivers of their own change. The theory generally looks at dialogue at the heart of social change. This theory is especially applicable in social media research due to their participatory character. Peisker (2011) argues that the relevance of social media in public opinion formation can best be understood if investigated through the lens of citizen participation. It is an approach that favours democracy. The current dialogue on the theory is the practice of citizen journalism which builds on the theory of public journalism. These are the approaches that this study draws on as it investigates how citizens are using Twitter to express opinions on matters that affect them on day to day basis.

In mass communication and media studies, the theory of participatory communication later came to be known as public journalism in the 1980's. Rosenberry and Burton (2010) contend that the theory came up as a theory in search of practice when a few journalists including Jay Rosen and other academicians, with the help of several foundations begun to think about how to sort out public life issues in relation to journalism. Their concern was how they would enhance democracy through information sharing. This movement represented a paradigm shift in a society where media were dominant. The practice of public journalism was hindered a bit by the economic changes and the internet explosion of the 21<sup>st</sup> century before it could get widespread acceptance. The internet signaled a change in the flow of information and with it, came the new practice of citizen journalism.

Rosenberry and Merrit (1994), discuss citizen journalism as one that exists when people are motivated to tell other people stories and events they believe are important and exchanging thoughts about meaning of the facts and events. The difference between public journalism and citizen journalism is that public journalism was a theory that emerged from the thoughts of a group of journalists and academicians who tried to involve citizens in news creation while citizen journalism is about

individuals, who are not necessarily journalists, who have concerns that they act on directly through information sharing.

Citizen journalism is viewed as a practice rather than a theory. No core group or individual has organized it into a movement or concrete theory (Rosenberry & Burton, 2010). It is not just a form of journalism but also a form of public life through which democracy is expressed and experienced. Singh (2009) says that citizen journalism is the same as public journalism, participatory journalism and democratic journalism, and basically involves citizens playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. Citizen or public journalism is different from advocacy in the sense that advocacy journalism focuses on defending an issue or agitating for or against something, while citizen journalism focuses on enlightening, informing, entertaining and educating other citizens. In this study, public journalism and citizen journalism are used synonymously.

Citizen journalism is an evolving concept that in mass communication can be viewed as the place of publics in news creation and dissemination of the same. It is therefore a practice not a theory. It is variously referred to as participatory journalism, guerrilla journalism, civic journalism, grassroots journalism among many other terms used to describe the role of the ordinary person in journalism (Singh, 2009). It is a challenging thought to traditional agenda setting that argues that the media not only decide what we think about but also how to think about it. The agenda setting theory clearly distinguishes between the media and its audience. The PC theory in general clears this distinction and gives the audience participation in media behavior.

According to Schaffer (2007), there are three types of citizen based media outlets. The community cooperatives led by voluntary labour with little to no professional experience, blog aggregator sites that allow citizens to scan multiple blogs and for bloggers to interact and the legacy media sites set up by established media but allow citizens to dominate content, for instance UReport that is operated by Standard Media Group and Kahawa Tungu, a blog operated by blogger Robert Alai, in Kenya.

Generally, citizens' reports will be more informal and opinionated than those of media professionals (Schaffer, 2007).

Citizen journalism can be categorized into three; independent citizen journalism, dependent citizen journalism and semi-dependent citizen journalism. In independent journalism, ordinary citizens disseminate news and other information without relying on professional journalists. Dependent citizen journalism is where citizens collaborate with professional journalists in distribution of information for instance sensitive information like the truth about a terror attack. Semi-dependent journalism is where citizens package information and only the established media can distribute the information for example radio talk shows. Hashtags are a form of independent citizen journalism.

New media enables citizens to play a much more active role in news production and distribution. This is especially true for user generated content (UGC) where the public looks for stories and uploads them as news. SM, especially, have pushed journalism towards the audience. This can be viewed as a paradigm shift in news gathering, processing and distribution. As the media do their usual role of gatekeeping, the public, especially online communities is now gatewatching (Jensen, 2012). In gatekeeping, journalists remain in control of every step of the process from source encounters to the final editing and dissemination of news. Gatewatching on the other hand allows users to watch, comment and edit every stage of the communication process. The users do this while engaging in news sharing and even production (Bruns, 2008b). Briggs (2007) contends that citizens are no longer passive receivers of messages from journalists. They create, share and comment on information thus making news a conversation other than a lecture or a linear message delivery outlet. Jensen (2012) agrees that there is a paradigm shift where the citizen produced media such as Global Reporter and OhMy News, the general spread of SNS as well as the influence of citizen bloggers is seen as evidence of a profound change in the role of news media and journalism.

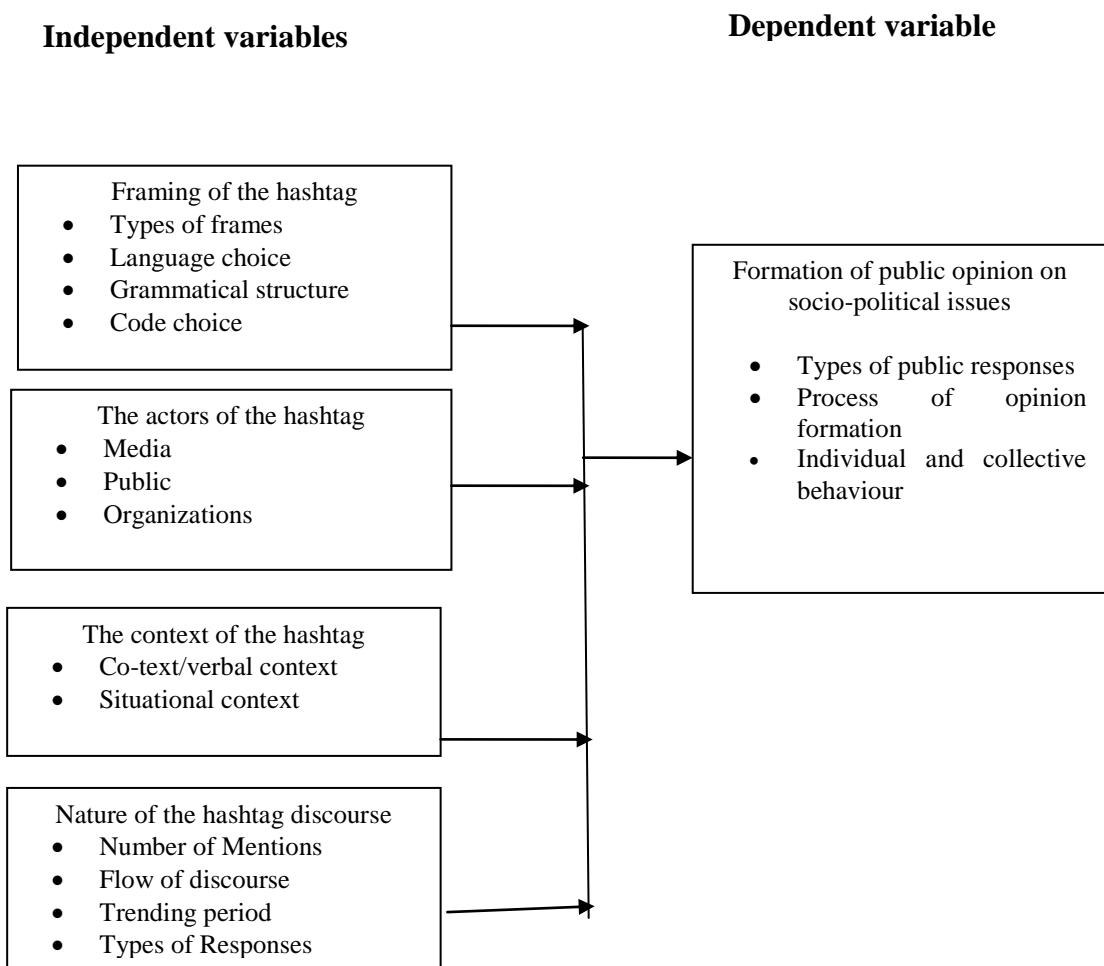
The PC theory is especially important in this research in addressing two objectives: the source of the hashtags and the respondents' behavior in the online discourse (actors) and the nature of discourse under a particular hashtag. The participation of citizens in online discourse is a way of them expressing their opinions and ideas to gain knowledge and sometimes effect change in their respective societies. SM allows interactions and processes of sense-making through social network structures and opens new ways for people to construct reality (Peisker, 2011). This construction of realities through online dialogue is the focus of this research. Citizen journalists are not professionally trained or formal in practice and they may prefer more opinionated and subjective news (Schaffer, 2007). The theory of PC was used to analyze these aspects in relation to the opinion formed and their manifestations in the wider society.

These two theories citizen journalism and media framing, basically address the objectives on framing, nature of discourse and actors of the hashtags. However, the hashtags are not created in a closed community that is only defined in the internet. The actors are part of a society governed by social rules of the masses and the ideologies of the ruling class. Hashtags are texts that convey messages. The use of language in the society to convey information and bring change is better evaluated under discourse analysis. This was done through a critical discourse analysis of the hashtags and tweets.

### **2.3 Conceptual Framework**

This section involves the conceptualization of variables that were investigated in the study. A conceptual framework, according to Rose (2008) is a tool that attempts to connect all aspects of a research inquiry from the statement of the problem, the rationale of the study, the literature review, the methodology up to the analysis of data and presentation. Mugenda (2011) describes a conceptual framework as a concise description of the phenomenon under study which is then presented graphically showing the variables of the study. The variables are in two key categories; the dependent variable in this case the formation of public opinion, and

the independent variables, that is, the framing of the hashtag, the hashtag actors, the context in which a hashtag is formed and the nature of discourse on the hashtag. The study argues that the actors, framing, context of formation and the discourse that the participants engage in, all influence the formation of public opinion.



**Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework**

#### 2.4 Review of Variables

This section includes a discussion of each of the research variables and a review of literature on the same. The independent variables include framing of the hashtags, actors of the hashtags, context of the hashtags and the nature of discourse of the

hashtags. The dependent variable, which is public opinion formation, is also reviewed.

### **2.4.1 Framing of the Hashtag**

Framing in the social sciences is associated with how groups or individuals organize, perceive and communicate about reality. It involves the social construction of a social phenomenon by mass media sources, political or social movements, political leaders and other players (Entman, 1993). Framing is therefore a process of selective influence over an individual's perception of the meaning attributed to words or phrases. . Framing refers to the way a message or information is packaged and presented to the public. This influences the way a message is received and interpreted. Meaning is dependent on framing. The frame surrounding an issue can change the way people interpret and perceive that issue. A frame encourages certain interpretations and discourages others. Framing requires techniques that help to reduce wrong interpretations and contextualize messages. Frames help people to connect what they already know in a particular context of communication. Framing refers to the way a message or information is packaged and presented to the public. This influences the way a message is received and interpreted.

Jensen (2012) explains that the concept of a frame suggests that an item of information whether arising from one's perception of the environment, from other people or from media technologies only makes sense when placed in a particular context. When information is collected from endless masses of information and bracketed in a certain way, it becomes a frame. Quoting Newman (1992), Jensen (2012) explains that audiences rely on categories that are largely derived from personal experiences to make sense of frequently unfamiliar events and issues in news media. These are interpretive frames that are different from those that journalists rely on. Jensen (1998) contends that audiences employ generalized and common sense super themes to establish meaningful links between the world of news and that of everyday life. Audiences mostly rely on interpretive frames that are

always being shaped and reshaped. Scheufele (1999) says that framing relies a lot on wording and syntax.

The current research analyzed these issues of framing with regard to language choice, wording (lexical choices), types of frames identified and the general framing of the hashtags in relation to the social aspect of framing. According to Carragee and Roefs (2004), power is an important aspect of framing as frames are cognitive and hegemonic constructs that serve distinct social interests. This aspect of framing was investigated using the CDA approach in data analysis under the social context and discursive aspects.

Chong and Druckman (2007) while explaining the tenets of framing theory, say that framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking of an issue. Framing can be considered in two forms; frames of thought consisting of the mental representations, interpretations and simplifications of reality and frames of communication, referring to communication of frames constructed by various actors. Chong and Druckman (2007) further reiterated that framing research focuses on two types of frames: equivalency frames and emphasis frames. The equivalency frames offer different but logically equivalent phrases which cause individuals to alter their preferences. They are worded in terms of gains versus losses. For instance, when frames are worded in terms of potential gains, people tend to choose the less risky option but when faced with frames of potential loss people tend to choose the riskier option. The emphasis frames on the other hand, offer qualitative yet potentially relevant considerations which individuals use to make judgments.

Chong and Druckman (2007) contend that frames in communication organize everyday reality by providing meaning to an unfolding strip of events and promoting particular definitions and interpretations of political issues. A frame in communication can only be defined in relation to a specific issue, event or political actor (Entman, 2004). For instance, news media frame all news items by emphasizing specific values, facts and other considerations endowing them with

greater applicability for making related judgments. Entman (1993) argues that news media promote particular definitions, interpretations and recommendations. Emphasis frames work by making particular considerations more applicable and more relevant to the judgment process.

Research on framing is very closely related to public opinion research. Chong and Druckman (2007) say that the phenomenon of framing effects in public opinion formation research is important. They explain framing effects as occurring when often small changes in the presentation of an issue or an event produce sometimes large changes of opinions. Framing is here situated within a larger democratic process that links politicians and other opinion leaders to the public especially through the mass media. One's frame of thought is seen to have an impact on one's overall opinion besides the frames of communication. For instance, politicians mobilize voters using particular policies by encouraging them to think about those policies along particular lines. This is invoking a frame in communication through wording that eventually makes the individual think in a particular way (frames of thought). Eventually, the opinion of the individual is swayed.

Another concept related to framing theory and public opinion formation is frame-alignment. This is explained by Snow, Rochoford, Worden and Benford (1988). They contend that frame alignment occurs when the frames projected align with the frames of participants to produce resonance between the two parties. When individual frames become linked in congruency and complementariness frame alignment occurs, producing frame resonance, a catalyst in the process of a group making transition from one frame to another.

According to Snow, et al (1988), framing efforts are affected or constrained by certain conditions. These include: one, the robustness, completeness and thoroughness of the framing effort which depends on the nature of the framing task at hand. There are three core tasks of framing: diagnostic framing (identification of problem and assignment of blame), prognostic framing (suggestion of solutions, strategies and tactics to a problem), and motivational framing (a call to arms or

rationale for action). Two, the relationship between the proposed frame and the larger belief system must be one that is of high hierarchical significance. Three, is the relevance of the frame to the realities of the participants. A frame must seem relevant to participants and must also inform them. This is in relation to the participants experience and has narrative fidelity. That is, it fits in with the cultural myths and narrations. Four, is the cycle of protest, meaning the point in which the frame emerges on the timeline of the current era and existing preoccupations with social change. In this case, previous frames may affect efforts to impose a new frame.

It is important to consider the factors that make a frame strong. Chong and Druckman (*ibid*) suggest that a strong frame is one that emerges from public discussions as the best rationale for contending positions on the issue because these are the frames that strike opinion leaders and audiences as being more compelling than alternative arguments. In this study the hashtags under investigation were those that have penetrated enough to achieve national debate. It is apparent that frames in communication matter since they have a direct relationship with the opinion formed by the target audience. Chong and Druckman (2007) argue that frames are not just done by the media but have other formulators as well. For instance, politicians often adopt communication frames used by other politicians, the media or citizens. Media frames sometimes mimic those used by politicians, social activists, other media outlets or ordinary citizens. According to Entman (2004), frames originating from administrators shape the frames used by other elites, media outlets and the public. However, the public reaction to the initial frame feeds back to the media and other elites and eventually influences the administration's view. This is an issue that was investigated in the Kenyan scenario.

Most research in communication has been on how the frames of the elite groups like media and politicians influence citizens' frames of thought, attitudes and opinions, which is basically framing effects. This study was investigating the source of the hashtags which may not always be the media or politicians as already shown by past hashtags in different parts of the world. These hashtags framing was investigated to

see if it has any effect on how influential the hashtag becomes on opinion formation. Framing in communication and media studies refers to the way an issue is presented to the public or target audience. In this study the hashtag was investigated in terms of how the hashtag is formulated, specifically, lexicon choices, language choice (in this case English, Sheng' or Kiswahili), code choice in terms of normal grammar or internet lingo and also grammatical structure, in consideration to the syntax of the hashtag. This is referred to as frames of communication which in turn will portray the frames of thought formed by the target audience.

#### **2.4.2 The Actors of the Hashtag**

The communication process is complex involving different players with differing roles though most times the roles are interchanged. The source of the message at times takes the role of the receiver and vice versa during the exchange of information. This behaviour is described in this research as inter-discursivity. Discursive practice is a discourse analysis term referring to the production and consumption of texts. The communication process treats the source of information as a central part of the process (Kang, 2010). The source is involved in the ideation process. It is the starting point of the communication process. Communication theory refers to the source as influencing the success or failure of the process by considering the aspect of source credibility. Kang (2010) contends that in previous research, source credibility has focused on the expertise or trustworthiness of the source of for the likelihood to provide credible information. In relational or interpersonal communication, source credibility can be analyzed by looking at characteristics like trustworthiness, expertise, reliability, intellectual worth, professionalism and experience.

In Kang's study on measuring social media credibility focusing on the blogger as source, the findings were that the participants of the study indicated that the source of the blogs was critical in their decision to read the blog or not (Kang, 2010). Kim (2015) studied the effects of source credibility and others' comments on online news evaluation by manipulating the source of online news and others comments on them.

The findings were that source credibility did not play a critical role on participants' online news evaluation but the comments of others did influence participation. This was an important finding in this research as most Kenyans react to news online and it is important to study the dynamics behind this.

In the Kenyan media environment currently, the mainstream media practitioners and the public formulate hashtags. Thus there are two sources of the hashtags; the media and the public. The media under study were those that are privately and state owned. The public is diverse and therefore needs to be categorized into manageable groups. The research defined public sources as those from politicians, ordinary citizens otherwise called KOT (Kenyans on Twitter), civil rights activists and celebrities in the media and other circles. The interplay between the journalists who have been framing news items all along and therefore influencing the opinion formed and the KOT was investigated. McCombs (2004) contends that sources other than the media may not only control the kind of issues that enter the news (agenda setting) but may also control how the news is presented. Hashtags were investigated to find out if that statement still holds true in relation to the source. The study looked at how these sources influence the response to the hashtag and eventually the formation of public opinion. The interactivity of the participants from the media and the public is what the researcher was investigating.

Every hashtag formulated on Twitter has a target audience and since social media sites have their own unique characteristics, the people who respond to the hashtag take center stage as they are the ones that form the opinion intended and express it. Human communication in general is affected by certain factors within the participants whether it is the sender or the receiver. These factors include gender, age, ethnicity, race, socio-economic class, relationship between participants, experience, level of education and political affiliation. To understand the level of involvement and influence of the hashtag the online respondents will be investigated by analyzing their responses. In SM exchanges, like in any other communication process, the source may become the respondent and vice versa as the conversation

develops. Thus, the researcher analyzed the texts to understand the nature of response and opinion formed in the course of discourse.

According to Jungherr (2015), only a handful of researchers have looked at the demographic characteristics of Twitter users (Ganous & Wagnr, 2014; Raine, *et al* 2012; Smith & Brennr 2012; Vaccari, et al., 2013). The studies found that Twitter users are aged between 18-29 years of age, are better educated and are slightly more politically interested than the general population. The studies concluded that the motives for the communicators on Twitter seem to be information gathering, feeling connected with politicians, social utility, entertainment and self-expression. These studies are fairly recent which indicates that the issue of respondents and general participation in Twitter discourse remains a deep area of research.

#### **2.4.3 The Context of the Hashtag**

Context is an important element in the communication process. Meaning is derived from contexts. The idea that meaning does not reside in the word but in the mind has been advanced to show the place of context during communication. This assertion implies that meaning is highly contextualized. What one says and means in one context may be different in another context. Van Dijk (2001, 2005) describes context in cognitive terms. He argues that in the course of our socialization we acquire the necessary knowledge to interpret, understand and remember language behavior in our culture. Wodak and Krzyzanowski (2008) contend that the best way to understand the concept of context is to use the triangulation approach which has four levels: the immediate language or text's internal context; the inter-textual and inter-discursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses; the extra-linguistic sociological variables or institutional frames of a specific context or situation; and the broader socio-political and historical contexts to which practices are embedded in and related. Stillar (1998) says that context can be used to refer to both the accompanying text of a particular stretch of language which is also called the co-text or the verbal context; or to the situational non-linguistic context of which a text is part. The situational context can be inferred from the co-text.

Situational context was explained by Halliday (1978) as having three characteristics that can be used to describe it: the social action which refers to what is going on and has a recognizable meaning in the social system with a subject matter in which the text plays a part; the role structure which comprises a cluster of socially meaningful participant relationship, both permanent attributes of the participants and the role relationship that are specific to the situation, including speech roles, those that come into being through the exchange of verbal meanings; and, the symbolic organization which refers to the particular status that is assigned to the text within the situation, its function in relation to the social action and the role structure including the channel and medium. The social action is referred as the issue regime or situational context in this research. The role structure is referred to as the actors in the hashtag discourse and the symbolic organization is the hashtag itself while the channel is the Twitter platform.

These three functions of situational context are labeled field, tenor and mode respectively. The type of social activity involved (field/issue at hand) activates the resources of the ideational function (mode/text); the role of the relationship involved (tenor/actors) activates the resources of the interpersonal function and the mode activates the resources of the textual function. According to Zappavigna (2012), context is functionally diversified as the combinations of field, tenor and mode. The field is akin to the notion of ‘topic’ in Twitter discourse which answers the question, ‘what is happening or what the text is about’. Tenor considers the social relationship of the actors in the hashtag discourse and the mode refers to the context called the co-text (how a text is constructed using linguistic elements). In this study the co-text context was synonymous with the frame of the hashtag.

Context in this research refers to both the situation in which a hashtag is formulated called situational context and the co-text described above. The situational context may refer to what is happening during that period that would make the hashtag come up, who is involved and how, referred to as the issue regime. The issue regime or the big story of the time was investigated as a trend that every interested party would be following. An issue regime can be precipitated by a crisis, a disaster, a behavior or a

normal day to day event. The situational context dictates the functional resources that are drawn upon in making, exchanging and understanding text in a communicative event.

#### **2.4.4 Nature of Hashtag Discourse**

All verbal and non-verbal forms in a communication event are conceptualized, contextualized and actualized through discourse between and among people. The hashtag symbol is used in Twitter discourse to identify texts that fall in the same topic or field. In this study the analysis was on the texts exchanged in a communication interaction through Twitter discourse. It is important to distinguish and show the relationship between text and discourse. Stillar (1998) contends that all written texts have certain distinct characteristics. For one, they all exhibit complexity in terms of the linguistic resources that users draw upon to make or understand them. Secondly, they perform critical rhetorical functions for the participants involved. Thirdly, they powerfully summon and propagate the social orders we live in. A text has signs that construct content (it is about something), it creates relationships (it is addressed and exchanged), and it produces texture (it is organized and has structure). Bearing in mind this description of text, a hashtag can be said to be a text being created and exchanged between and among Twitter users. Stillar (1998), also notes that a text draws upon a language to accomplish a rhetorical act. It is created out of purpose by an audience and can bring about change in a state of affairs.

Discourse is described by Stillar (1998) as *action* in the sense that it does something for social agents in the real contexts of their living. Therefore, no discourse can take place outside the situated embodied experiences and interests of the participants. Discourse is an integral part of social life. Discourse reconfirms and re-enacts existing social relationships and patterns of behavior and at the same time negotiates these relationships and introduces new meanings and behaviors. Discourse is fully dependent on systems of meaning-making resources of language codes which may be phonological, graphological, lexical, syntactical and semantic. These codes are used to construct texts and exchanged in different situations.

Zappavigna (2012) explains that discourse is a social act and therefore all participants recognize that instances of discourse by symbolically framing, enacting and organizing experience are linked with the social systems and structures through which they interact. Discourse is both a medium and a product of social interaction. The term discourse then is used to refer to the social activity through which we make meanings with linguistic and other semiotic resources. Discourse concerns the participants involved, the particular kinds of situations in which a text plays a part, the social systems and structures that bear upon how and what texts can mean to those involved (Stillar, 1998).

Stillar (1998) contends that the terms discourse and texts are complimentary in that particular texts realize particular discourses. The text can be taken as a record that is always related to socially determined and socially determining discursal processes. Thus, we meet discourse through instances of text. In discourse analysis the object of analysis is the text whose traces of discourse are the specific social activities and relationships. This study took the hashtag message as the text under analysis in a social interaction on Twitter. So the analysis of the Twitter discourse is one that looked at actual texts occurring in real contexts of communication.

A study of opinion formation is dependent on the messages being exchanged between participants. Discourse has its own structure more so in online locations, specifically social media sites. Discourse can be analyzed and interpreted by looking at aspects like the initiation of the dialogue or how it is started; the flow of the discourse and the engagement and involvement of participants through mechanisms like turn taking. The responses from the discourse actors could be positive, negative, neutral or conflicted.

Stillar (1998) argues that when we make or exchange texts we display the meaning-making potentials of language systems or linguistic structures. Linguistic structures function to represent experiences of the world, construct social relationships among the participants in discourse and create a text that is internally cohesive and adheres to the context of use. The respondents may also be involved in code switching and

code mixing behavior that is key in the construction and interpretation of meaning and subsequently the formation of opinion about an issue. It is through participants' language choice and use of language elements that we can infer views, attitudes and opinions about issues. It is also important to examine the issue under deliberation or debate and the number of mentions it gets on Twitter.

#### **2.4.5 Formation of Public Opinion**

Formation of public opinion can be used to refer to the moment when the public begin to have a belief, feeling or attitude towards something. These can be negative, positive, neutral or even conflicted. These opinions can be looked at as cognitive responses (thoughts provoked) or affective responses (feelings provoked). These opinions can be expressed through the central processing route and the peripheral process of opinion formation. The central process is one in which opinions are formed from a thoughtful consideration of relevant information. The peripheral process leads to the formation of opinions without thinking about relevant information. The international Encyclopedia of Social Sciences (1998) contends that public opinion is not easy to define. The term was first used during the French revolution when Louis XVI's finance minister Jacques Necker referred to public opinion as governing the behavior of investors. Generally, public opinion is a collection of individual opinions on an issue of public interest. These opinions can influence individual and group or government policy, decisions and actions.

The principal approaches to public opinion study can be divided into four parts: quantitative measure of public opinion; investigation of the internal relationships among individual opinions that make up opinion on an issue; description or analysis of the political role of public opinion; and the study of both the communication media that disseminate the ideas on which opinions are based and of the uses that propagandists and other manipulators make of those media. This study investigated the media and the actors in Twitter hashtags and how they influence opinion formation. There are also studies on how public opinion influences government (Laswell, 1964). According to Laswell (1964), opinion studies could be on symbol

manipulators meaning the source and which in this study are referred to as the hashtag creators and audiences who are exposed to communication. The role of mass media and the effects of the ideas communicated are relevant to such questions as how opinions take hold among large numbers of people, why they are distributed as they are as well as how they are related to each other and how they change.

According to a study by Gazzar (2013), public opinion can be defined as an aggregate of individual views, attitudes and beliefs about a particular topic expressed by a significant proportion of a community. This can be about politics, culture, literature, art, fashion and a myriad of other social issues. Gazzar (2013) outlines four conditions that a phenomenon must have for it to count as public opinion; there must be an issue; there must be a significant number of individuals who express opinions on the issue; there must be some kind of consensus among at least some of these opinions; and this consensus must directly or indirectly exert influence. To understand public opinion, one must find out the motivations behind all these aspects. Public opinion is influenced by factors like; the environment, mass media, interest groups, labour unions or organizations, opinion leaders and other more complex influences. This study sought to identify how the formation of hashtags to express opinions is influenced by these factors if at all.

The debate on public opinion is generally associated with the scholarly work of Jurgen Habermas (1962), a cultural theorist, who discussed the concept of the public sphere. According to him, the public sphere in Europe was greatly affected by commercialization which reduced public and media space, thus inhibiting people's ability to evaluate the practices of the state (Harcup, 2004).

According to Singh (2009), Herbamas viewed the public sphere as a domain of our social life in which public opinion can be formed out of rational debate leading to democratic decision making. Herbamas, in his 1962 book, "*The structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*" talked about the role of public opinion in shaping political power and policy. He argued that through assembly and dialogue the public sphere generates opinions and attitudes which affirm, challenge or guide

the affairs of the state. The success of the public sphere in this case is dependent upon several factors like the extent of access, the degree of autonomy, the rejection of hierarchy so that all participate equally, the rule of law and the quality of participation where logic guides all. This should be done through a rational critical discourse. Herbamas talked of opinion formation associations such as trade unions, voluntary organizations, concerned citizens, grassroots movements and sports clubs, enabling this debate so as to counter messages of authority (Burger and Lawrence, 1991). This research adopted this analogy of public opinion formation in public debate through hashtag use in Twitter.

Kaschesky, Pawel and Guillaume (2011) argue that public opinion research aims at identifying emerging societal trends based on views dispositions, moods, attitudes and expectations of stakeholder groups or the general public. The research can then be applied to policy making in order to anticipate likely impacts of policy measures and communicate expected benefits and consequences. The role of opinion leaders is also crucial in opinion formation research. The opinion leaders may not necessarily be powerful in terms of holding positions of control but they do influence others through news alerts on social, political and economic issues. They raise attention to an issue, discuss it frequently and eventually change the opinion of others (Nisbet, 2011).

#### **2.4.6 Socio-political issues**

The current study focused on how the use of Twitter hashtags influences the formation of public opinion on sociopolitical issues in Kenya. The issues addressed were those that were nationally important. National importance here refers to the ability of an issue to affect or create interest in a large portion of Kenya's population. Socio-political issues in this context are Kenyan issues viewed as social and political. Politics can be explained as an ongoing conversation about a social issue that may or may not affect policy (Kaid, 2004). Social issues influence a considerable number of individuals in a society and may include issues like civil rights, poverty, racism, social classes and inequality, education, marital and domestic issues, unemployment

and so on. These issues are intertwined with issues described as political such as governance, policy, electoral issues, propaganda, campaigns, immigration, foreign policy and diplomacy and so on. Hence, the study adopted socio-political issues as it is not easy to separate the political from the social.

Kuzhman (2016) explains that interest in studying social issues begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the adoption of the concept of the welfare state. This concept was explained by scholars in two lines of thought, the positivists and the constructivists. Positivists believe that the main tools of solving social issues are the manifestation of improper performance of functions of society and thus social issues can be studied as social disorganization. Constructivists on the other hand believe that dysfunction ceases to be a problem when it is understood and fixed. For a social issue with political agenda to be understood it must be taken up by the media and the public. The issue must get attention and be debated upon. The source of the issue must have the trust of the community and its magnitude and seriousness should be clear (Kuzhman, 2016). Sociopolitical issues that get public and media attention are then debated upon and arguments are built then eventually opinion is formed. In the entire process, the issue is influenced by regional authorities, regional media and regional community. This study examined how hashtags on sociopolitical issues are formulated posted online, debated by the public and eventually gain government, media and other players attention. Hashtag discourse obeys this cycle as explained by Kuzhman (*ibid*).

Munawar (2012) contends that media reshape public opinion and influence cultural, social and political perceptions of people. Media do this by bringing awareness and highlighting certain attributes about national issues to the public. This study was about how Twitter hashtags are used to bring emerging issues to the attention of the public and guide discourse. The issue of addressing sociopolitical issues through the media was also explained by Chiluma (2011) who studied sociopolitical crises in Nigeria suggests that media use headlines that mold social actions, attitudes and perceptions and can be used as ideological tools for social criticism. Hashtags are issue based and the text itself acts as a headline that guides debate.

## **2.5 Empirical Review of Related Literature**

### **2.5.1 Literature on Social Media**

The literature available on social media research is on the impact of social media in the general human communication landscape. The coming of the internet or Web 1.0 was in itself a big step in information sharing but the introduction of Web 2.0; especially social media in the 21st century was a turning point in the way information was shared. Social media is defined by Ngai, Tao and Moon (2014) as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 which allow users to create and exchange user-generated content (UGC). The participants in this information-sharing can be referred to as a virtual community. Social media are not just for sharing information, as they are increasingly being used for other social, economic and political causes including business, building careers in information technology, political campaigns and mobilization of publics for civil or other courses.

The development of web 2.0 began in the early 1990's with the creation of World Wide Web by Tim Berners Lee which was followed by the development of a web browser by University students called 'Mosaic' (Poe, 2011). Poe (2011) outlines how the social networking sites (SNS) evolved. For instance, a social network site called sixdegrees.com was launched in 1997 but closed in 2000 as it failed to survive economically. SM officially began in the 2000's with the appearance of LinkedIn and MySpace in 2003; emergence of blogs and creation of Facebook in 2004; the founding of You Tube in 2005 and the launch of Twitter in 2006. In 2009, Foursquare social networking site was launched which allows users to share their current locations with friends by checking in through a smart phone application or text message. Other sites like Instagram, Google+, WhatsApp, Flickr, Palmchat, Pinterest, Spotify, Snapchat and Tumblr have come up and the list continues to grow. Social media are a fast growing technology and new sites come up in quick succession. Social media allow people to produce information but they are also

receivers and distributors of information within their network of online communities. These SM have had a great influence in communication globally due to their real time applicability and ease of use (Zappavigna, 2012). SM serves to close the gap between public and private sphere. They are instruments of communication, leisure and change and are opinion formers and changers. Since the occurrence of mobile phones, the influence of SM on their users has been on the rise across the world in the last ten years. Michaelsen (2011) contends that social media involve an on-demand access to content, anytime anywhere on any digital device as well as interactive user feedback, both creative and participative. This means that the users not only use information but they can also create information online. Another important feature of SM is real-time generation of unregulated content. It is a free for all field of opinions and ideas.

A study by Storck (2011) describes social media, as online networking sites that involve user – generated content (USG) and participation in a networking site they identify with others with whom they establish a loose relationship. The relationships established on SM are variously labeled as fans, friends, followers, contacts and so on depending on the site. Activities conducted online are also named differently depending on the site. Terms used for various interactions include ‘hook-ups’, ‘hang-outs’, ‘poke’, ‘tags’, ‘hits’, ‘likes’, ‘trend’ and so forth (Poe, 2011).

Moreover, SM have been embraced by politicians during campaigns around the world especially presidential candidates. Many countries have adopted social media as a campaign tool. They use it to sway public opinions on candidates and key political issues. For instance, the social networks used by Obama in the 2012 elections include Twitter, Google+, Tumblr, Facebook and Pinterest. This is done through issue framing on social media where the public then engages in debate, opinion expression and formation and finally change (Storck, 2011). In Kenya, almost all politicians resorted to SM during the 2013 election campaigns. President Kenyatta engaged many SMS in his campaign including Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr and Flickr.

Kenyans exchange a lot of information on WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter and this has been growing steadily (Communication Authority, 2016). This information ranges from political, social, cultural, educational, and economic and entertainment pieces. When an issue arises, a large population is able to receive this information through these platforms. The public does this through WhatsApp groups and individual messaging, through Twitter hashtags and general information sharing on Facebook and other social media sites such as Instagram and Snapchat for the youthful population. A lot of research has been done in social media use and it is still an area of great research interest (Michaelesen, 2011; Storck, 2011). Some of the areas studied include social influence of social network sites, user perception, user personality, user intention, user behavior and the general effect that the media have on the user.

Valenzela (2013) studied the use of social media for protest behavior looking specifically at the role of information, opinion expression and activism. The study found that using social media for opinion expression and activism mediates the relationship between overall media use and protest behavior. This relationship was explained using three variables; information, where social media was viewed as a news source; expression, where social media was viewed as space for expressing political opinions; and activism, where social media was viewed as a venue for joining causes and finding mobilizing information.

Other studies have looked at social media effects. Capurro, et al. (2015) studied the role of social media references during public deliberation sessions. The focus of the study was on public engagement in scientific debates such as biofuels. The paper argued that media can support learning, reflection, misinformation or polarization during an event. Another relevant study is by Gearhart and Kang (2014) that investigated social media in television news focusing on the effects of Twitter and Facebook comments on journalism. The findings of the study were that social networks sites' comments played a significant role in audiences' evaluation of news. According to the study Twitter comments received the highest perception of journalistic quality especially when featured in hard news. Stories featuring social

network sites' comments using internet lingo were received more favorably than those using normal language. Thus Twitter comments were found to possess journalistic value.

### **2.5.2 Literature on Public Opinion Formation**

Some research has also been done on opinion formation and expression on social media. Gazza (2014) looked at how different frames are used and the reasons used to support the frames. The focus is usually on how online opinions emerge, diffuse and gain momentum. Public opinion scholars have recently been looking at the role of social network sites such as Twitter, Facebook, You Tube and LinkedIn in the formation of public opinion.

Kaschesky, Sobkowicz and Bouchard (2011) argue that the goal of opinion research is to identify emerging trends based on views, dispositions, moods, attitudes and expectations of stakeholder groups or the general public. Thus the models of opinion formation based on real-world online communication enable the simulation and prediction of the evolution of communication patterns on a specific policy issue within a region or cross-regionally for global comparison. Opinion formation models usually employ three stages; the initial stage, the alert stage and the percolated stage. The democratic space accorded by social media allows citizens to be more empowered, demanding and actively involved in policy issues and other important matters. The citizen is no longer just a recipient of information.

Another study on mass communication theory is that of Gearhart and Zhang (2013) which examined the place of spiral of silence theory in the social media environment. They looked at gay bulling and online opinion expression guided by that theory. The findings of the study were that the theory was applicable in online forums since the willingness to self-censor and congruency to national opinion climate were significant predictors of various online opinion response strategies. However, the aspect of individual characteristics was important in willingness to communicate about an issue indicating a liberating effect on opinion expression. The theory was applied to social network research because the social networks are anchored on

relationships that can be considered public forms of opinion expression through interpersonal exchanges. In this case one would be conveying an opinion or belief to an audience however large or small.

### **2.5.3 Literature on Twitter Use**

Social media have also been used in social campaigns in relation to human rights, gender equality and other drives. An example is #BringBackOurGirls, a hashtag that was developed by Twitter users after the abduction of teenage girls by Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria. Hashtags are also used in business especially for influencer-based marketing where they are tailored to convince buyers. The use of SM in this case is quite broad ranging from politics, business, breaking news, sports reporting, celebrity vines, activism, to art. In general SM have allowed the public to discuss and scrutinize issues that they could not touch previously especially in countries with little democratic space.

This research focused on the use of Twitter for public opinion formation. According to Mollet, Moran and Dunleavy (2011), Twitter is a form of micro-blogging which allows users to send or receive short public messages called *tweets*. Tweets have no more than 140 characters and can include links to blogs, web pages, images, videos and other online materials exchanged between online communicators. Twitter uses particular terminologies and symbols to guide its users such as *follow*, *unfollow*, *block*, *retweet (RT)*, *reply*, *@*, *mentions*, *#*, *shortened URLs*, *Direct message (DM)*. Mollet, Moran and Dunleavy (2011) have also indicated that there are three tweeting styles that a user should be familiar with: substantive tweets, usually written in complete sentences and are intelligible on their own; the conversational style which is much more fragmented and relaxed; and a middle ground or compromise style which is more feasible.

The invention of the Twitter hashtag is credited to Chris Messina who sent a tweet on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2007 that read, “How do you feel about using # (pound) for groups as in #BarCamp [message]?” Following this trial hashtags became a mainstream genre in the US by October 2007, when citizen journalists used them to give updates about a

series of forest fires in San Diego that is #SanDiegoFire (Twitter.com). According to Shapp (2014), the # symbol was proposed since Messina's idea was premised on already existing conventions of CMC such as Internet Relay Chat (IRC) where information is organized and relayed in regard to topic channels under the notion of user based information implementation. Messina was interested in improving contextualization, filtering and exploration on Twitter by creating a system of channel tags.

Millions of tweets are posted each day around the world thus creating a huge database. Users get around this by using # to focus and follow a topic or debate of their choice. There were about 319 million monthly active users of Twitter by close of 2016 (Saturday Nation, 11/2/2017). Recently, Twitter introduced *trends* a feature that helps to trace popular topics in different countries and cities around the world (Jungerr, 2015). This has made it easier for users to participate in topics relevant to them in terms of issues and personalities that they are able to geolocate. To identify the participant or expected respondent in a Twitter dialogue, the symbol @ is used preceding the user's account name. It is a user identifier. This is followed by a word preceded by the hashtag symbol #, for instance, @bernardklook at #waigurudeals. This tweet contains metadata that allows the user to interact with others. A user is able to receive all tweets from those that the user follows without the requirement of reciprocation. RT which stands for retweets, @ is followed by a user identifier and # followed by a word represents the topic under debate. The RT feature was launched in 2009 to encourage conversational tagging and could be equated to email forwarding allowing users to engage in a message thread without addressing them directly (Boyd, et al, 2010). The debate that goes on Twitter about various issues allows the users to express opinion and even influence the opinion of others. A hashtag that gains popularity and attracts long debate on Twitter is said to be *trending*. Hashtags have been used for social and political campaigns, marketing with an aim of convincing buyers, propagating activism and so many other activities. All these activities are based on opinion formation about the issue or item at hand.

According to AfricaneWS.com, (2013), the first Kenyan on Twitter (KOT) was @kaimuri who registered his account in 2007. This is commendable for an African country considering that Twitter was established in 2006. The first Kenyan issue to trend worldwide was #Makmende in 2010 which involved a superhero who resurrected through a local band @justaband. In the 2014 World Cup qualifier match between Kenya and Nigeria there was a social media war on Twitter dubbed #SomeoneTellKenya and #SomeoneTellNigeria, in which over 100,000 tweets were posted per minute. The issue was about the accommodation given to the team members in Kenya and Nigeria. Kenyans were protesting against being given poor accommodation in Nigeria while the Nigerian team was accorded VIP accommodation in Kenya (AfricaneWS.com, 2013). Since then lots of trending tweets generated by individual Kenyans and mainstream media have come up and the Kenyan public has been very vibrant in these interactions.

Ndonye (2014) contends that SM have revolutionized news dissemination and other discussions within the country, which are highly mediated by Facebook and Twitter. Due to their popularity SM are used for political communication, marketing, promotion and advocacy. In the 2013 and 2017 election campaigns SM were used by Kenyan politicians for party popularization and vote mobilization. President Uhuru Kenyatta uses SM for communication and updates the public regularly by posting information on the walls of various social networks that he uses more especially Twitter and Facebook. The most notable use of the hashtag in Kenya was in 2011 during the drive against hunger involving journalists and other social celebrities, dubbed #KenyansforKenya. Citizens were mobilized on social media to feed starving people of North Eastern province and millions of shillings and food stuff were collected. A hashtag was again used in 2013 during the Westgate Mall attack, that is, #WeAreOne. A lot of money, blood and food were collected generally bringing Kenyans to a point where they could speak with one voice. Apart from mobilization, hashtags have also been used by Kenyans to raise opinions both positive and negative. Examples of such hashtags are; #POTUS. The hashtag was used to express their pride in President Obama as a man with Kenyan routes now addressed as The

President Of The United States (POTUS); #147IsNotJustANumber was used to express anger and solidarity after the Garissa University terror attack; #HotbedofChampions and #SomeoneTellCNN in reaction to CNN's #hotbedofterror, and #SomeoneTellDonaldtrump an outburst over America's presidential hopeful's description of Kenyans. These examples are an indicator that citizen journalism is taking route in Kenya through social media.

The use of Twitter as a news source by mainstream journalists has been variously studied such as done by Bruns (2012) in Australia, Vis (2013) in England, Alvarez (2012) in Spain and Schultz and Scheffer (2010) in the United States of America. Bruns (ibid) found that journalists have incorporated Twitter in their work processes at personal and organizational levels. He describes journalism as participatory where audiences took part in news. Vis (ibid) found that Twitter was being used in England as a tool for breaking news especially key national events. In Spain, Alvarez (2012) found that journalists from mainstream media used Twitter to distribute news they had already processed, make it viral and encourage audience participation. These studies are relevant to the current study in that online sources of news are an interesting area especially in a developing country like Kenya.

Research on the influence of Twitter is increasingly being done due to its popularity as a social network among all demographic categories. Some research has looked at the application of certain communication theories and models to online dialogue on Twitter. Such a research is the one by Choi (2014) on the use of the two-step flow of communication in Twitter-based public forums. The study explored how a piece of information flows in social media-based public forums, whether opinion leaders emerge in such forums and what characteristics opinion leaders have in such forums. The study was based in South Korea. The findings were that the two-step flow of communication model still had explanatory power in online public forums and that opinion leaders were influential but not content creators.

Grant (2015) investigated Twitter discourse under the hashtag *#discrimination* concerning public reactions in a case of a breastfeeding mother who was ejected

from a UK retail store. The research was aimed at investigation online opinion regarding breastfeeding in public and the protests emanating from the case on the right to breastfeed. The research was also comparative between comments on Twitter and Mail Online. From the findings the comments on Twitter were 76% supportive while those on Mail Online were mostly negative at 85%.

There have been a few studies on the use of hashtags in SM. The approaches have been different. Some scholars, such as Kehoe and Gee, (2011), have examined hashtags as topic markers that indicate the aboutness of a SM text. Other scholars have looked at hashtags as features of communication that allow the additional role of forming communities or publics online (Yang, et al, 2012; Lin, et al, 2013; Bruns and Burgess, 2011). Most of these studies employed content analysis and interviews as data collection which was also adopted by this study.

## **2.6 Critique of Existing Literature**

The research reviewed shows that social media's role in information seeking, processing and dissemination can no longer be ignored. Many studies are being done based on the notion of media effects and influence in this digital era with great interest in the rapidly evolving social networks. The citizen is viewed like a recipient of information dispensed through various media. The study argues that this is no longer the case and the audience no longer silent but an active participant in news creation and dispensation.

This study looked at how the hashtag formed by both the public, in this case, the Kenyans on Twitter (KOT) and those that are formed by journalists through the mainstream media are influencing the formation of public opinion and how this impact on policy makers in the government and the private or public corporations. Studies done on the effects of social media have mostly been on political mobilization with a focus on election campaigns and revolutions.

Studies on opinion formation through social media have been done elsewhere and they examine different concepts from this study. A study by Storck (2011) analyzed

the use of Twitter in the 2011 Egyptian revolution as a mobilization tool. The government of Egypt was toppled after the public was mobilized through twitter and their interest hyped by consistently posting under the topic. This study proved that social media can be used to form opinion of the public and effect change.

Meghar (2014) examined the role of media in public opinion formation in India. Metzgar and Maruggi (2009) investigated the use of social media tools during the 2008 elections of the United States of America using content analysis. President Obama used different social networks to mobilize supporters during his campaigns and win votes. Political communication is about public opinion formation so this study is relevant to the current one. An article by Makinen and Kuira (2008) looked at social media use during the post-election crisis in Kenya in 2007 and early 2008. Kenyans were using social media to mobilize, raise funds and pass important information in real time. Michaelson (2011) looked at the use of social media in the democratization of Pakistan. These studies are relevant to the current one in terms of how social media is used to mobilize the public and influence opinion formation. This study looked at the new trend in Kenya where the media meets the citizen journalist in news dissemination and issue coverage through the use of Twitter hashtags.

## **2.7 Research Gaps**

The focus of this research was on the formulation of the hashtag, that is, who formulates it, what informs this formulation and when it is mostly used with an emphasis on the structure of the hashtag in terms of language especially lexical choice to find out how they are framed and whether these aspects contribute to the way public opinion about an issue is formed. The empirical review and critique of existing literature identifies the following research gaps: first, no study known to the researcher has looked at the influence of the hashtag on public opinion formation in Kenya. Most of the studies on Twitter use have been in other countries especially the western countries that embraced technology much earlier than developing

countries. A study in an African setting where issues of politics, governance and general social issues exist in a different framework is important.

Secondly, this study employed two theories to assess the influence of Twitter in Kenya, the Framing theory of mass communication and the participatory communication theory with an emphasis on citizen journalism. These two theories have not been tested before in online discourse under the same data in Kenya.

Thirdly, the data analysis was done using content analysis and the critical discourse analysis approach that is basically a linguistic theory that looks at symbolism and ideological interpretation of meaning using a sociological perspective. This theory has not been tested on Twitter hashtag discourse to the best of the researcher's knowledge. It was used to analyze language used in the framing of hashtags by the participants and the issues that emerge in the discourse between participants, that is, social and political issues.

The fourth research gap is that impact of social media and citizen journalism on individual opinion forming decision making in Kenya has also not been tested. It was important to look at how human communication behavior on the internet can drive the opinions of self and others.

## **2.8 Summary**

This chapter has outlined what is known and researched on the topic and captured the research gaps that this research hopes to fill. There is also a discussion of the theories used in the study namely the framing theory and the participatory communication theory. The concept of opinion formation has been discussed drawing on general literature on the same as well as the studies conducted in the area. The aspect of opinion formation was investigated based on the source, framing, context and structure of the hashtags as well as the respondents of the hashtags formulated. The investigation of the relationship between the mentioned variables is the core of this study. The literature has been able to show the gaps of knowledge that the research hoped to fill.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter entails the methodology of research that was employed in the study. The chapter covers the analysis and presentation of data collected to enable the evaluation of the influence of hashtags on the formation of public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya. The analysis and presentation is univariable, where each variable is analyzed and presented on its own. The research had four research objectives: to establish the influence of framing of hashtags on the formation of public opinion, to explain the role of hashtag actors on formation of public opinion, to determine the influence of the context of hashtag formation on the formation of public opinion and to investigate the influence of the nature of discourse on the formation of public opinion. The chapter is divided into sections discussing the research design, population, study locale, sampling procedure, data collection instruments, and data analysis and data presentation. Tables, graphs and pie charts were used in data presentation.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

The study utilized a mixed methods research design namely quantitative and qualitative approaches. The approach was cross sectional where data collection was done in a fixed period of time, all hashtags formulated between January 2014 and March 2017. The streaming of Twitter data and the interviews were not done throughout this period but between August 2017 and December 2017. The quantitative approach was descriptive in nature. Description of the data was done so as to explain the general characteristics of the population. Description categories of hashtags including trending period, source, responses, lexicon choice, emotive score, language and code choice was done. The use of a mixed methods research design was appropriate since the study used both quantitative and qualitative data. The objectives of the study produced different forms of data. The first objective on

framing for example produced numerical data obtained through counting and the use of scores. This led to use of descriptive statistics in its analysis. The data from interviews and the tweets was qualitative and required explanation through narration based on theory. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize all results and eventually give an overall regression value for all variables.

The study used a mixed methods research design which involves the collection of both qualitative (open-ended) obtained from interviews and quantitative (closed-ended) data obtained from online sources where hashtags and tweets were collected, in response to research questions or hypotheses. The procedures for both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis were conducted rigorously in reference to adequate sampling, sources of information and data analysis steps. Due to the nature of data obtained that was on human communication, this research was mainly qualitative and the quantitative description was to supplement the qualitative description of the data. As noted by Creswell (2014), the key assumption of this approach is that both qualitative and quantitative data provide different types of information, often detailed views of participants qualitatively and scores on instruments quantitatively and together they yield results that should be the same. This research adopted this design since it was based on Twitter exchanges online that are a representation of conversation and are mostly on views about daily happenings in the country and globally but produced numerical data.

Wimmer and Dominick (2000) explain qualitative analysis as a research design that focuses on observations, that is visual data, and verbal data which reflects everyday experiences which was the case in this study. In qualitative research, the researcher develops a wholesome picture of the research, analyzing words and phrases and giving a detailed report of the informant' views as is the norm in descriptive research (Creswell, 1998). Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) explain that qualitative research include designs, techniques and measures that do not produce numerical data but data that is in form of words. Human behaviour such as expression of feelings and opinions which was investigated in this study produces qualitative data. Qualitative data for this research was obtained from interviews with media personalities and

independent bloggers who develop hashtags. The television stations under study also engage the public in various discussions online through the hashtags.

Quantitative research on the other hand includes designs, techniques and measures that produce discreet numerical and quantifiable data (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). Numbers make observations more explicit. This quantitative data opened up the possibility of doing simple to complex statistical analysis and models. Quantitative data for this study was obtained from the hashtags themselves and the tweets streamed from Twitter. This data was collected, quantified and analyzed using content analysis and descriptive statistics. P-Values were calculated for each variable so as to test the hypothesis. The data generated from this research needed to be organized through simple statistics in the form of tables, graphs, pie charts, percentages and frequency distributions as is done in descriptive qualitative research (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Overall regression was run on the independent variables to determine the degree to which they influence the formation of public opinion and eventually establish the most influential variable.

### **3.3 Target Population**

A research population refers to groups of people, objects or texts with similar characteristics that a researcher wishes to invest (Bobbi, 2011). The study had three populations. The first target population for this research was the hashtags generated by media practitioners and other hashtag developers in Kenya, in the period between January 2014 and March 2017 as it was the period within which Kenyans were actively formulating hashtags and also the research period. These hashtags are in their thousands. For instance, in the last quarter of the year 2013, a total of 123,078 hashtags were generated in Nairobi alone according to Portland 2014 Report, a communications and public relations firm that was investigating how Africa tweets. This was a period of only three months. Mobile subscription and internet penetration has grown up to 44.119 million and 36.095 million Kenyans respectively in 2018 which means the tweets are being generated in their hundreds of thousands in three months. This makes it impossible to list all the hashtags that were generated in a

period of over two years accurately. For instance, in the U.S.A. the number of tweets generated by users has been on the rise from 5000 in 2007 to 50 million tweets a day in 2012 (Zappavigna, 2012). These tweets are diverse covering everything from personal issues to political opinions. Furthermore, Twitter has a limit as to the amount of data one can stream making it harder to list all the tweets. In consideration of all these factors it was not tenable to list all the hashtags that Kenyans generated in the period between 2014 and March 2017. In this case, the researcher was working with an indefinite/unknown population. However, it was possible to search trending tweets in the period and select the social political ones that made the study population. Bearing this in mind, the total number of hashtags generated in the specified period that were on socio-political issues and were able to elicit national debate are less than 100, specifically, 67 (Twitter Trends, Kenya).

The second population targeted for the study was the television stations that are involved in creation or dissemination of the hashtags. There are currently 62 local television stations including vernacular stations (Communication Authority, 2018). This number keeps changing as there are many stations that have applied for licensing from the Communication Authority making it an ongoing process. Other stations airing on pay TV channels though over 100 in number are foreign owned. The study focused on local stations only since it is on public opinion formation by Kenyans on local issues that raise national interest and debate.

The third target population is the public hashtag developers and consumers who fall into categories such as ordinary citizens, political operatives and commercial hashtag developers. This group gave information on source, framing and context of hashtag development. The units of analysis for the study were the hashtags and the developers of those hashtags as well as the tweets under each hashtag which formed the discourse under study.

### **3.4 Sampling Frame**

According to Sekaran (2005), a sampling frame is a list of all members of the population from which a representative sample is drawn for purposes of research.

The members of population were listed after obtaining a list of local TV stations that are free to air from communication authority and obtaining data from Twitter on hashtags that would be geolocated to Kenya. The units of analysis in this research were individual journalists, independent hashtag developers, hashtags, tweets and Kenyans on Twitter (KOT). In this research, the population of Kenyan-formulated hashtags was in thousands from which only 67 were relevant to the study, that is, socio-political hashtags with most being on issues of national importance to Kenyans. That is those that touch on every Kenyan's life. This number is large as online research can generate a lot of data that may not be analyzable (Zappavigna, 2012). The research had to arrive at a tenable method of getting a manageable sample size. Van Dijk (2013) says that Twitter has been gradually launching new geospatial features where users from a particular region can share messages concerning their area or the messages can also be searched by entering the area name in the search bar. The hashtags sampled for the research were generated from Twitter Trends.com that generates geo-located tweets. This enabled the researcher locate tweets to Nairobi, Kenya. Television stations using hashtags were studied by analyzing the content on their walls that relates to the selected hashtags and by interviewing online or digital journalists working there. The data on television stations in Kenya was obtained from the Communication Authority Market share index 2015, Q4 Report. The study investigated only six of these channels based on their market share index. The communication authority June 2015 report outlines the leading stations thus: Citizen TV has a market share of 38.84%; KTN 15.19%; NTV 11.93%; K24 8.96%; KBC 7.09% QTV 6.44%; Kiss TV 5.11% Family 3.02% GBS 2.26% and others 1.16%. The sampled televisions were those with established websites and presence in SMS especially Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. The first six were targeted in this study but QTV was closed during the research period and the respondents were not interviewed.

Below is a table showing the market share index of each of the sampled stations:

**Table 3.1: Local TV Stations Market Share Index**

<b>TV Station</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Market Share Index (%)</b>
Citizen	Private	38.84
KTN	Private	15.19
NTV	Private	11.93
K24	Private	8.96
KBC	Public	7.09
QTV	Private	6.44
Kiss	Private	5.11
Family	Private	3.02
GBS	Private	2.26
Others	Private	1.16

The study also involved an investigation of the sources of the hashtags and in this case the source maybe the media or the public. The media was investigated by interviewing hashtag developers in the media or the producers concerned with digital content. The media content online is created by digital journalists and these were also interviewed. On the public side, KOT were targeted so as to get how they create or respond to hashtags. Kenya has approximately 2.2 million Twitter users which is quite a large population. The KOT sampled were university students at the bachelors' level and Masters Level doing information or computer studies and mass communication and journalism in three different universities and aged between 18 and 35 and so were most likely to use social media (Stillar, 1998). The researcher purposively selected students at the bachelors and masters levels since not all students doing media and information technology courses are Twitter subscribers to represent the KOT. All the respondents interviewed in the media stations and the organizations developing hashtags fell into this age bracket. In total 16 respondents were targeted. Four hashtag creators were also interviewed, two from each company identified.

### **3.5 Research Sample and Sampling Techniques**

This study employed multistage sampling and purposive sampling where different populations were sampled using either of the two. Purposive sampling technique allows a strategic choice of sample that is relevant to the research questions (Welmann & Kruger, 1999; Robson, 2011; Bryman, 2012; Kothari, 2003). This is dictated by the purpose of the study which is to analyze only those hashtags that have social and political meanings and also a longer lifespan than just the minute by minute tweets. Wimmer & Dominick (2006) contend that purposive sampling also considers how research subjects conform to specific criteria as was the case in this study.

Hashtags are issue-based. Thus, the hashtags selected for study were those that fall into political and social issues. This was because most of the issues under debate in Kenya can be analyzed under these two themes. Social issues include human rights, domestic violence, marriage, parenting, affirmative action, education, art, fashion, gender relations and safety. Political issues are like party politics, governance, civil rights, government declarations and decisions, elections, campaigns, party affiliation, constitutional issues and activism. The tweets were selected using Twitter search engines so as to get the most popular trends for the period selected. In this case, multistage sampling was used to come up with the tweets to be investigated for the period between January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 and March 31<sup>st</sup> 2017. This period was chosen for two reasons: one, it is when Kenyans have used hashtags the most (Twitter Trends.com) and also the period during which data collection for this research was commenced and completed. The duration is long but the researcher was able to get all the nationally trending hashtags and enough data for the research. The comments under investigation were those on Kenyans on Twitter (KOT) walls.

Twitter only picks the trends for the day and the number of tweets and retweets for a particular hashtag. The study focused on the hashtags that are based on political and social issues in Kenya and which had a lifespan of three days or more, were featured on national television and were debated nationally. This period of time in terms of

online trending is necessary in determining the influence of the hashtag. A hashtag that appears once online may pass a lot of people and may never be recognized by mainstream media compared to the one that is trending for days. The hashtags that lasts for a few minutes or hours and fizzles out may not be a useful measure of public opinion. In this regard, the hashtags that met this criterion in the specified period were 67 as obtained from Twitter Trends, 2014-2017. The socio-political hashtags formed the units of analysis for this study. The study of public opinion formation is based on issues that directly affect the general public like the social issues and the political ones that ordinary citizens want to voice and congregate about.

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), where there is no accurate estimate value available for the proportion of the target population assumed to have those characteristics, then 50% of the population should be used. In this case, half of the population is 34 hashtags. To ensure representativeness of the sample, the researcher also employed another criterion for identifying the hashtags to be used in the research based on the nature of research, which is the formation of public opinion. Public opinion involves national debate with a sizeable number of participants so as to be viewed as “public”. Since all the 67 hashtags streamed did not get the same attention from the public, the researcher chose the sample by using a discrimination criterion that involves the number of tweets or mentions that a hashtag gets from the users. The method used is one of inclusion versus exclusion based on the number of mentions. In this case the researcher picked only those hashtags that had 10,000 mentions and above for the research. Following this criterion, 5 hashtags were selected from the year 2014, 22 from the year 2015 and 8 from the year 2016, for the period between January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 and May 25<sup>th</sup> 2016. The total number of hashtags for the study thus was 35. A sample size of 35 was adequate for social science research based on content analysis. Other researchers including Charmaz (2006), Green and Thorogood (2009) and Ritchie et al (2003), support this sample size arguing that the data collected in social science research can be too much and so a sample of less than 50 is appropriate. Bertux (1981) contends that 15 is the smallest number of participants irrespective of the methodology. A study on social media,

especially Facebook and Twitter can be faced by millions of responses and this data can cause logistical problems during analysis. Therefore, the lesser the hashtags the more effective the analysis would be.

In selecting the television stations the researcher also purposefully selected those stations that engage in the formulation of the hashtags and are leading in viewership rating. Not all stations have embraced the use of hashtags. The researcher also purposely selected both the state owned station (KBC) and the privately owned stations, ensuring that the ownership is as diverse as possible since the influence of actors of the hashtag is an objective of this study. Source credibility is an important aspect in communication according to Kang (2010) though it has not been investigated in the hashtag use or influence. Source of hashtag in this study refers to the hashtag creator. KBC television was sampled as it is the only state owned station. Citizen TV represented the Royal Media Services which is the largest private media outlet in Kenya. NTV represented the Nation Media group. The Standard Group was represented by KTN while K24 represented Media Max, a private organization.

The sampling of television stations was also based on the market share index by the Communication Authority of Kenya, where the first six with the largest market share in terms of viewership were involved in the study. The respondents in these stations were the journalists involved in creation of hashtags or the digital journalists in each station. The researcher targeted five journalists from each media station making a total of 36 respondents. The hashtag creators in Twitter may not be all known but the researcher employed snowball sampling to get 6 representatives of the citizens who formulate hashtags as well as government operatives and private bloggers online. Bailey (1994) explains that snowball sampling, also called chain referral sampling, employs the use of informants to identify participants and is used when the respondents are not visible to the researcher thus making other sampling procedures impractical. The researcher was able to identify two commercial hashtag developers and 9 respondents who also develop hashtags but not for commercial or professional purposes.

### **3.6 Data Collection Procedure and Tools**

This research used a mixed methods approach that employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The first phase involved the collection of hashtag tweets or mentions for each of the selected hashtags. This formed the primary data for specific objectives on framing, actors, discourse, and context and opinion formation. This research involved a transcription of online exchanges between participants and the interview schedule was used on journalists and citizens who develop hashtags.

The quantitative data was collected by streaming the tweets from Twitter that are related to the hashtag in question. The researcher listed all the hashtags to be analyzed and then streamed the data from the site using software for collecting historical data on Twitter. This data were collected using Microsoft software NodeXL that allows streaming of a hashtag data from Twitter database. This software allows data search by place, time or period, date, and nature of response that is positive, negative, question or even a retweet. This was combined with public API streaming, a real time streaming of tweets filtered by user ID, key word or geographical location of tweets, as well as Survey Monkey tool. The API allows large number of tweets to be collected or downloaded at once and takes into consideration aspects like the geolocation of tweets for easier sampling. The hashtags collected were geolocated and only those formed in Kenya were sampled. Initially 67 hashtags were streamed but 35 met the sampling criteria. Data obtained from online streaming was meant to address three aspects in line with the research objectives, namely, framing of hashtags, actors in the hashtag discourse and nature of hashtag discourse. This information would then reflect opinion expressed online by the actors.

Qualitative data on opinion, views about hashtag formulation, actors and the context of formation was obtained from the tweets posted under the selected hashtags and from interviews. The collection of data from Twitter involved scraping of sites for textual data in the form of hashtags and the tweets under each hashtag. The data was collected one hashtag at a time to avoid a mix up of issues and opinions. This data

was recorded into hard drives for storage. Permission was sought from media houses and the NACOSTI to stream data from the SNS and walls of the selected TV stations where needed.

The second phase of data collection involved conducting of unstructured interviews on respondents from the media fraternity and the public. The researcher, with the help of two research assistants, interviewed the journalists and hashtag developers in their offices at varied based on the participants' work schedules and the KOT were interviewed in their respective universities. Note taking technique was used together with live recording using voice recorders where respondents allow. The audio data was then transcribed for analysis.

### **3.7 Data Collection Methods**

The researcher obtained permission to do research from the National Commission for Science Technology and innovation prior to collection of data. This research permit together with an introductory letter as a PhD student in the department of Media Technology and Applied Communication of the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, were presented to all participants in the study. Data for this research was collected using interview schedules for the source of hashtags and analyzing influence of the hashtags. The data were collected in two phases. The first phase involved the streaming of hashtag tweets or mentions of each of the selected hashtags. This formed the primary data for specific objectives on framing, context, and nature of discourse and opinion formation. The hashtags and tweets under each hashtag were streamed using online software, Survey Monkey and Twitter public Application Program Interface (API) as data collection tools. The data was then stored in hard drives and discs waiting coding and analysis.

The second phase involved conducting of interviews from the media fraternity and from public hashtag developers selected. Interviews on hashtag users and respondents (KOT) were also conducted. Note taking technique was used and complimented by audio recording using tape recorders for respondents who allowed it. The audio data was later transcribed for analysis.

### **3.8 Pilot Study**

To ensure validity and reliability of data, a pilot study was done on a total of three hashtags. Bailey (1994) contends that validity tests are done to determine if the actual concept under study is being measured and that this is being done correctly. Reliability refers to the consistency of the instrument. If the instrument has validity then it also has reliability. The source, framing and context were investigated and interview done on one media personality and one ordinary citizen specialized in hashtag development. 3 hashtags were streamed and assessed to find out the suitability of the streaming software and methods. Wimmer and Dominick (2001) argue that 10-25% of the sample is adequate for a pilot test prior to the full study being carried in order to test reliability and validity of instruments. In this case 1 TV station was sampled for the pilot study. From the pilot study the researcher was able to realize the weaknesses in the interview guide. The preliminary part did not have the questions on designation and department yet the researcher was to find out who formulates the hashtags in the media and whether there are departments specifically meant to embrace the paradigm shift in news creation and dissemination. These questions were then incorporated in the interview guide. The number of questions then increased from 16 to 24 short ones to address the issue of paradigm shift in media practice and policy decisions.

### **3.9 Data Analysis and Presentation**

Data collected was edited for accuracy, consistency and completeness so as to ensure representation of views as originally intended. It was then coded using identified themes. The tool used for quantitative analysis was IBM SPSS version 21. This tool was appropriate for quantitative data analysis. It allows for complex coding and analysis as it can even analyze images, videos, emails, spreadsheets, online surveys, web data and information from Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. After the coding of data the tool was used to post the data and manipulate it to get frequencies, t-values, P-values and ANOVA for each variable and eventually test the hypotheses, since it can be used to code data by relationship, structure and for comparison purposes.

Twitter allows public streaming of data through Twitter Streaming API that gives 1% of tweets and Firehose which allows 100% access but at a cost. These two channels were used by the researcher to collect the data on the hashtags based on the geo-location of the tweets so that only those hashtags formulated by Kenyans were streamed. Once the data was streamed another tool, Gephi was used to allow easier visualization and analysis. The data was collected and organized through content analysis and analyzed using critical discourse analysis. Content analysis, that is, extraction of themes in relation to specific variables was manually done for the quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative statistics specifically t-test, p-values and ANOVA was done using SPSS. An overall regression model is provided for all the variables. This was done because the study was on the influence of the hashtags on the formation of public opinion. It was found important to establish which of the variables was more influential in public opinion formation among the four independent variables of framing, context of hashtag formation, nature of discourse and the actors involved in the Twitter discourse.

Frequency distributions were used to examine different aspects like the flow of discourse, the number of mentions, number of negative /positive comments, number of tweets with similar opinion such as in support or against and tweets with similar words, structure and code to examine framing.

Content analysis involves systematic study of messages conveyed in natural language text. It includes the evaluation of both the content of the message and the style of presentation. Content analysis is a method used to describe written, spoken or visual communication. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) define content analysis as any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information. Content analysis is also explained by Berg and Lune (2012) as a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use. Kutter and Cathleen (2012) define content analysis as a standardized hermeneutic procedure of textual data interpretation in which the individual assigns abstract categories to content in the texts for analysis. These categories may comprise issues, claims, problem definitions and frames. The messages selected should retain as much

as possible the exact wording. In content analysis, words, phrases, sentences, ideological stance, concepts and people are units of analysis. Content analysis can focus on the communicator (feelings, opinions and experiences), to the situation of text formulation, to the socio-cultural background of the communication process, to the text itself or even the effect of the message.

Content analysis is done in two ways which constitute types of content analysis: conceptual analysis and relational analysis. Conceptual analysis is used to establish the existence and frequency of concepts and is most often represented by words or phrases in a text. Relational analysis examines the relationship among concepts in a text to determine the meanings that emerge and can be applied to linguistic and cognitive science.

In this study the tweets being studied were framed using these units of analysis and therefore content analysis was most certainly relevant, that is, both conceptual (framing and nature of discourse, and relational (for opinion formation and analysis of factors). The researcher conducted content analysis on the data collected from the hashtags and the tweets under them. Data collected were mostly classified using words and themes. The data from hashtags was first streamed using Twitter API so as to geolocate the hashtags and obtain only those created in Kenya about Kenya. These hashtags were then categorized in terms of number of mentions. The ones with over 10000 mentions, totaling 35, were sampled for study. The hashtags were counted and classified in terms of theme (sociopolitical), types of frames, number of mentions and duration of exposure online.

The hashtags were categorized in different ways depending on the objective under investigation. For framing, the hashtags were categorized in terms of type of frames, that is, whether frames of thought, communication, emphasis frames or equivalent frames; the choice of language and code; and the grammatical structure, that is, ordered or non-ordered. Words were also classified in terms of simple, emotive or catchy. The hashtags were counted in terms of theme, political and social, and their formulators. The social themes included relationships, ethnicity, economic class,

gender issues, education, and art. These formed the express themes of the study. The amount of time spent on a particular topic, that is duration of exposure, was also examined. The number of mentions on one hashtag was considered as this may have a direct implication on how influential a tweet is. The expression of opinion was analyzed by looking at statements that sound positive, negative, neutral or conflicted as this gives the opinion the individual holds about an issue. The respondents were also asked to give a score of 1-10 to determine how emotive a hashtag was. The answers gave quantitative data. In content analysis these categories must be exhaustive and mutually exclusive which the study guarded. Qualitative data was obtained from tweets in Twitter and interviews on respondents sampled for research. The interviews provided complimentary data on framing, actors and context of hashtag formulation. The tweets provided data on nature of discourse under the hashtags.

The researcher complemented the quantitative data with qualitative data obtained from interviews and tweets which are basically conversations on Twitter. To further address the gaps in content analysis, the researcher employed the use of critical discourse analysis approach by Fairclough 1989. The study was on the influence of the influence of the hashtags on the formation of public opinion on sociopolitical issues in Kenya. Content analysis may not adequately explain social aspects of the hashtag discourse and the effects they have on opinion. CDA explores aspects such as power relations, information creation and dissemination and how all these may affect how the information is produced and propagated in society. All aspects of life are guided by discourse (Van Dijk, 1991).

Critical Discourse Analysis was used to analyze the influences of the socio-political contexts on discourse and the effects of those factors. This is important as the study was on opinion formation. It is the public that forms opinion. This opinion is conceptualized, contextualized and actualized through discourse. The formation of public opinion is very much dependent on what one hears spoken or written. Thus, language is an integral part of this research. People use words and put them in a

certain way to influence thinking. This is referred to as framing in communication events (Entman, 1993).

One of the objectives of this study was to analyze the framing of the hashtag and how that may influence formation of public opinion. This study also looked at socio-political issues represented in the hashtags. The conversations in Twitter are based on issues in particular contexts. People produce texts (hashtags) that they use in a communicative event (for instance a discussion on a tragedy). They then form opinions in the discursive process. Most of these opinions are based on societal values, norms and ideologies (social practice). To address these aspects, Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was employed in the analysis of the data. CDA is a type of discourse analysis that studies the way social power, abuse and inequality in societies are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk especially in the social and political contexts. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach was proposed by Norman Fairclough in 1989 in his book *Language and Power*. He was extending the work of earlier linguistics like Fowler (1979) and Michael Foucault (1972). Later on, other scholars extended Fairclough's ideas and came up with different models of analyzing discourse. These analytics include Van Dijk (1993) and Pierre Bourdieu (1991).

This study sought to expose the use of language in SM that expresses the ideologies of the masses versus the ruling class in relation to socio-political issues discussed in Twitter. The hashtag in this research is viewed as a form of discursive resistance where Kenyans address the ruling class by expressing opinion on different socio-political issues. Schiffrin (1994) explains the concept of discourse by looking at the general approaches of linguistic analysis, that is, structuralism and functionalism. The structural paradigm views discourse as sentences while the functional paradigm views discourse as language use. Thus one view is about the description of structural features of language and the other is about the use of that linguistic structure in society. This study tries to bridge the two approaches through the critical discourse approach by Fairclough (1989) that analyses discourse on the two levels; structure (text) and use (discursive practice and social context of language use).

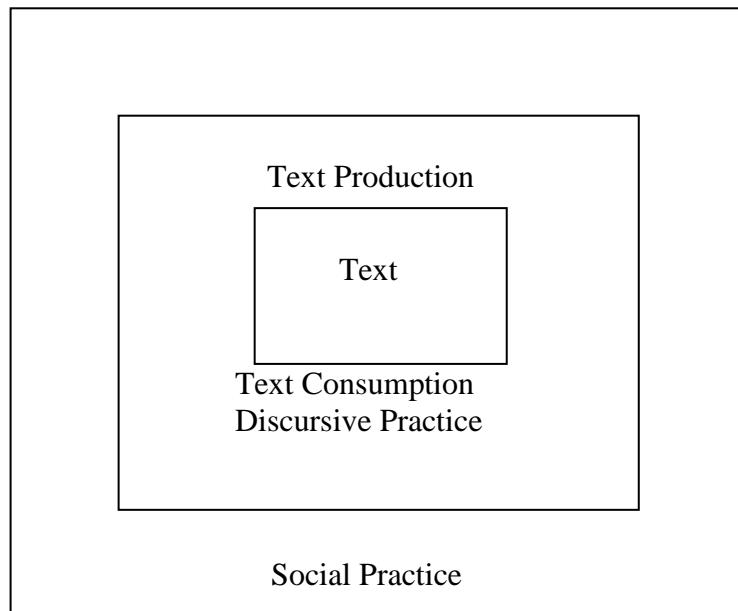
CDA treats discourse as social practice and analyzes the influences of social, political and cultural contexts on discourse. Van Dijk (1993) says that CDA examines ways in which powerful gate keepers in the society influence social beliefs and values and shape beliefs through the standards they set for what is and is not acceptable. Wodak and Fairclough (2007) say that CDA is an approach that is used to study relationship between language and social context. To explain this, CDA uses seven principles: it addresses social problems; views power relations as discursive (that is, they are exercised and negotiated through discourse); argues that discourse constitutes societies and culture including relations of power; contends that ideologies are produced through discourse and therefore to understand ideologies one must not only examine the text but also the discursive practice (how texts are produced, received and interpreted) as well as the social effects they have; discourse is history and can only be understood through its historical context; the link between text and society is the media; CDA is interpretive and explanatory in that it is dynamic and open. It can be affected by new readings and contextual information. The study investigated these characteristics in the hashtags formed by Kenyans on Twitter.

This study drew on the work of Fairclough (1992b) that gives an approach that is text-oriented in relation to discourse analysis. This approach unites three traditions: detailed textual analysis as applied in linguistic studies; a macro-sociological analysis of social practice; and, the micro-sociological interpretative tradition within sociology where everyday life is treated as the produce of people's action in which they share a set of common sense rules and procedures. Fairclough combines textual and social analysis. He looks at discourse in three ways: discourse as referring to language use as social practice; discourse as language used in a particular field; and discourse as a count noun referring to a way of speaking which gives meanings to experiences from a particular perspective such as political, feminist or liberal. This study used the discourse as social practice which is within the macro-sociological approach. The hashtag is a text used as social practice and is unique in its structure and use.

Fairclough (1989) argues that discourse contributes to the construction of social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge of meanings. Discourse, therefore, serves three functions, a relational function, an ideational function and an identity function. To understand discourse, one should consider the communicative event and the order of discourse. Within the order of discourse, there are discursive practices within which text and talk are produced. Thus, every instance of language has a communicative event that consists of three dimensions: It is a *text*. That is, it is in form of speech, writing, visual image or all of them. It is a *discursive practice* in that it involves the production and consumption of those texts. It is a *social practice* as every communicative event belongs to a society. The three dimensions should be covered in a communicative event. The analysis should focus on the linguistic features of the text (text), the process relating to the production and consumption of the text (discursive practice) and the wider social practice in which the communicative event belongs. The relationship between the text and social practice is mediated by the discursive practices. According to Fairclough (1992b), texts cannot be understood in isolation but in relation to webs of other texts and in relation to the social contexts of communication. The text (formal linguistic features) influences both the production and consumption process. In the model the text is the realization of discourse linguistically. In this case the analyst considers the linguistic features like grammar, vocabulary/lexical choice and sentence structures. The main aim of CDA is to examine the link between language use and social practice. It looks at the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of social order and change.

In this study these levels of analysis were discussed under the four objectives. The text was investigated under framing. In coming up with a text (hashtag), one must choose words and arrange them in some order. This choice is based on particular factors that developers and consumers revealed. This is connected to the second level on the discursive practice. This involves the production of texts and how they are received and consumed. In this case the production conditions (framing) and their interpretation was considered. The production and consumption are highly interactive. This is referred to as inter-discursivity. A high level of inter-discursivity

is associated with change while low inter-discursivity is associated with reproduction of established order. These dimensions are demonstrated in the figure below:



**Figure 3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis Model**

Source: Fairclough's Model of C.D.A. 1992b: 73.

Fairclough and Wodak (2008) say that CDA is generally used to study the relationship between the use of language and social context. They outline principles that guide CDA: that it addresses social problems; that power relations are discursive in the sense that they are exercised and negotiated through discourse; discourse constitutes society and power including relations of power; ideologies are produced through discourse; discourse is history; the link between the text and the society is the media; and that CDA is interpretive and explanatory.

This theory generally looks at language in relation to societal systems like politics, culture, ideologies, and philosophies and how these affect discourse. Discourses in this theory are ways of thinking; behaving, interacting, valuing, believing, speaking, reading and writing that are accepted and are instantiations of particular roles by specific groups of people. These ways define the general view of the theory

(Mesthrie, 2000). This is very important in the current research as the aspects outlined are related to opinion formation. This study also analyzed language choice in the framing of the hashtags and the symbolic power of such choice. The CDA was appropriate due to its ability to go beyond the text and examine social and political aspects that inform discourse. The analysis in this case was qualitative and descriptive.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data by use of mean, standard deviation, P-values and percentages. This was in order to present information on such arguments like positive, negative, neutral or conflicted when testing the opinion of the respondents to the hashtags. The analysis of variance and regression model enabled the researcher to establish the significance of each variable on public opinion and determine which was more influential than the rest. Data presentation was done descriptively through tables and pie-charts. According to Bailey (1994), the results of content analysis can be presented in tables containing frequencies and percentages. The study had univariable tables where each variable was presented individually.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the analysis and presentation of data collected to enable the evaluation of the hashtags on the formation of public opinion in sociopolitical issues in Kenya. The analysis is univariable where each objective is addressed separately. The study was guided by four objectives namely: to establish the influence of the framing of the hashtag on public opinion in sociopolitical issues in Kenya; to explain the role of the actors of hashtag formation in formation of public opinion; to determine the role of context in the formation of hashtags in opinion formation; and, to investigate the influence of the nature of the hashtag discourse in the formation of public opinion. This chapter comprises of data analysis, findings and interpretation. Results are presented in tables, graphs, figures and pie charts. The analyzed data is arranged under themes that reflect the research objectives.

#### **4.2 Response Rate**

The sample for the research was obtained through purposive and snowball sampling was applied in some cases. The media houses sampled were six but one of the stations, QTV, was closed in the course of the research, before data collection on sampled respondents and therefore it was not possible to get authentic information on any hashtags journalists in the station may have formulated. The researcher targeted 5 respondents from each media station. The total number targeted from the six stations was 30 media personalities. However, a total of 22 respondents were interviewed. The QTV journalists were not interviewed. Reasons given for not turning up for interviews included busy work schedules, personal emergencies, frequent travels/field work and domestic issues. The journalists interviewed were those working in the digital content departments who were referred variously as digital editorial and online content department. The government and opposition agencies/bloggers who are contracted to manage public information on social media,

specifically Twitter, did not respond at all citing busy work schedules. The KOT studying at the university targeted were 12, two from each year at bachelors level, totaling 8 and two for each year at the masters level, totaling 4, out of which 10 from 3 universities responded. That is a response rate of 85% which is within limit.

**Table 4.1: Research Respondents Distribution**

Target Group	No. of Respondents	Targeted	No. of Respondents
<b><u>TV Stations</u></b>			
KTN	5		<b>5</b>
NTV	5		<b>5</b>
K24	5		<b>3</b>
KBC	5		<b>4</b>
CITIZEN	5		<b>5</b>
QTV	5		<b>0</b>
<b><u>Bloggers</u></b>			
Govt. online agents	2		<b>0</b>
Opposition online agents	2		<b>0</b>
<b><u>KOT</u></b>			
JKUAT	6		<b>6</b>
Strathmore	4		<b>2</b>
UON	4		<b>2</b>
<b><u>Hashtag developers</u></b>			
Oncue Digital	3		<b>2</b>
Belva Digital	2		<b>2</b>
<b>Total No. of Respondents = 36</b>			

The independent hashtag developers were not easy to locate and snowball sampling was employed. Two organizations, Belva Digital and Oncue Digital, which deal with digital content development and web management, participated in the research. In each of the two organizations, two hashtag developers were interviewed, making a total of 4 respondents. The researcher hoped to interview at least 5 hashtag developers. The total number of targeted respondents was 49. The total number interviewed for the research was 36. The response rate was therefore 77% which is adequate for research as explained by certain researchers such as Nulty (2008) and Kiess & Bloomquist (1985) who say that a response rate of 60% or more is

appropriate for sample numbers exceeding 30 and Bailey (1987) gives 75% as a good measure of adequacy for the same sample.

### **4.3 Test for Reliability**

The reliability of an instrument refers to its ability to produce consistent and stable measurements. Bagozzi (1994) explains that reliability can be seen from two sides: reliability (the extent of accuracy) and unreliability (the extent of inaccuracy). The most common reliability coefficient is Cronbach's alpha, which estimates internal consistency by determining how all items on a test relate to all other items and to the total test- internal coherence of data. The reliability is expressed as a coefficient between 0.00 and 1.00. The higher the coefficient, the more reliable the test is.

In this study, data collection instrument, which is interview, was tested on 10% of the sample of the sample to ensure that it is relevant and effective. One TV station and three hashtags were involved in the pilot study. This was not part of the research sample. Reliability was tested using questionnaires duly completed by respondents selected from one station.

Table 4.2 shows the reliability results. The data was reliable since the cronbach alpha was above 0.7 which was used as a cut-off of reliability for the study. Therefore the internal consistency reliability of the measure was excellent. This indicates that the data was reliable since an alpha coefficient higher than 0.70 signifies that the gathered data has a relatively high internal consistency and could be generalized to reflect the respondent's opinions on the study problem.

**Table 4.2: Reliability coefficient**

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Comment
Framing	0.734	Accepted
Source of hashtag	0.706	Accepted
Respondent of hashtag	0.701	Accepted
Volatility of the hashtag	0.813	Accepted
Situational context	0.723	Accepted
Co-Text	0.820	Accepted
Opinion Formation	0.739	Accepted

#### 4.4 Tests for Validity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was performed to test for validity. KMO is a measure of how suited the research data is for factor analysis. The test measures sampling adequacy for each variable in the model (Cerny & Kaiser, 1977). KMO returns values of between 0 and 1. KMO values of between 0.8 and 1 indicate the sampling is adequate while less than 0.6 indicate not adequate and should be addressed. Interpretive adjectives for the KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy are: in the 0.90 as marvelous, in the 0.80's as meritorious, in the 0.70's as middling, in the 0.60's as mediocre, in the 0.50's as miserable, and below 0.50 as unacceptable. The value of the KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy for this set of variables was 0.771, which would be labeled as 'middling'. Since the KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy met the minimum criteria, and there was no problem that required the study to examine the Anti-Image Correlation Matrix.

Bartlett's test of sphericity tests the hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix; where all diagonal elements are 1 and all off-diagonal elements are 0, implying that all of the variables are uncorrelated. If the Sig value for this test is less than our alpha level, we reject the null hypothesis that the population matrix is an identity matrix. The Sig. value for this analysis led to rejection of the null

hypothesis and concluded that there were correlations in the data set that are appropriate for factor analysis. This analysis met this requirement.

**Table 4.3: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy**

<b>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.</b>		<b>0.771</b>
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	107.242
	Df	3
	Sig.	<b>0.000</b>

## **4.5 Analysis of Research Variables**

This section involves the use of descriptive statistics to analyze and present qualitative and quantitative data in reference to the study variables for the interpretation of study findings. A critical discourse analysis on each variable is also done to give an insight into the social aspects involved in hashtag production and consumption. Each variable is discussed in relation to the relevant theory. The framing of hashtags, for instance, is discussed using the tenets of the framing theory. The analysis of the data is therefore univariable. The influence of the actors of the hashtag on public opinion formation is described in reference to the theory of citizen journalism under the theory of participatory communication. The context and nature of hashtag discourse are analyzed using the critical discourse analysis approach.

### **4.5.1 Framing of the Hashtag on Public Opinion Formation**

The first objective of the study was to establish the influence of framing of the hashtag on public opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya. To explain the concept of framing in hashtags the researcher looked at aspects like the type of frame that the hashtag portrays, the choice of words when coming up with the hashtag, the language chosen, the grammatical structure or syntax of the hashtag and the code chosen for the hashtag. These are analyzed and discussed below.

#### **4.5.1.1 Types of Frames**

According to Jensen (2012), every message that is used in communication has two frames. The first types of frames are those of the mind that guide the way audience interprets messages depending on their environment and personal experiences. They are also called interpretive frames and they are always being shaped and reshaped in the mind of the recipient of the message. In relation to the formation of public opinion the interpretive frames are the ones that show what opinion the respondent of message forms. Thus, they are related to the way the message is decoded and interpreted. The second type of frames is frames of communication, which are based on the production of the messages. The frames of communication involve the actual ideation and coding of the message. It is what informs the form and the communicative structure the message takes. In this study form of the message is the hashtag. The way this process is done (framing) is what would make one form an attitude, feeling or perception about the issue under debate, effectively forming an opinion about it. In this regard, frames of communication involve the creator of message deciding the choice of words (lexicon choice), grammatical structure, language choice and choice of code. The creator decides how message will look like (form) so as to effectively achieve the communication objective. The types of frames were identified by the researcher from the hashtags themselves. There were no respondents for the types of frames. These were analyzed based on content analysis done on all the 35 hashtags sampled. The words used on the hashtags were analyzed to determine the frame. All the 35 were found to have the two basic frames, the frames of mind/thought and frames of communication. The creators of the hashtag come with the communicative frame, for instance, the hashtag #MyDressMyChoice. The audience interprets the message dependent on other factors in the communication event like context and background information. Understanding this hashtag means knowing who is talking about dress choice and why. This is the interpretive frame from which respondents to the hashtag give different opinions on the issue at hand through tweets.

Chong and Druckman (2007) and Entman (2004) identify two other frames in messages: the equivalence frames and emphasis frames. The emphasis frames are designed to make particular considerations more applicable and more relevant to the process of judgement and opinion formation. The equivalence frames are premised on the possibility of gaining or losing or negative versus positive or even risk versus gain. Using contents analysis, the hashtags were counted in terms of the frame type and categorized as such. The 35 hashtags were analyzed by the researcher in terms of whether they were formed using equivalence or emphasis frames. Out of the 35 hashtags 6 had equivalence frames and 29 had emphasis frames. This translates to 17.14% and 82.85% respectively. These results indicate that the hashtags are in most cases given an emphasis frame. This is in collaboration with Entman's (2004) view that the media frame all news items by emphasizing specific values, facts and other factors that would help the audience make judgement. Emphasis frames are directly aimed at helping people make judgement and are therefore highly opinionated. Hashtags that had emphasis frames were more in number and had more mentions and longer duration of trending. Hashtag developers seem to prefer emphasis frames to equivalence frames. Some of the hashtags that exhibited these qualities include: #147IsNotJustANumber, #DeadBeatKenya, #StopTheDrunkPresident, #HotBedOfTerror, #PastorOfImpunity #SomeoneTellCNN. The hashtag #147IsNotJustANumber emphasizes that the number of students who died in the Garrissa attack was significant and the government needed to treat the matter with the level of seriousness that such tragedies demand. So it emphasizes the fact that people died and the value attached to that. #HotBedOfTerror was also framed to emphasize the insecurity in Kenya as a result of frequent terror attacks. #DeadBeatKenya was a hashtag framed to bring to light the fact that there are many irresponsible men in Kenya who sire children but do not provide for them as expected. Women used the hashtag to expose irresponsible husbands and boyfriends. #PastorOfImpunity was also premised on an emphasis frame on a faulty judicial and justice system where the guilty are let free due to their socioeconomic status. The use of emphasis is also seen in the hashtag #SomeoneTellCNN. The anger expressed by

Kenyans to CNN's assertion that Kenya is a hot bed of terror was clear in the wording.

The equivalence frames were fewer and tended to call for debate directly. The hashtag #BabaWhileYouWereAway was such a frame. Here the formulator of the hashtag comes up with a frame that ignites debate on how Kenyans see their lives when the main opposition leader Raila Odinga is in Kenya and when he is out of the country. The hashtag compared the situation of governance when the opposition leader is in the country to put the government in check and when he is absent. The other equivalence hashtag was #KenyansVSZimbabweans. The comparison was between the Kenyan team and the Zimbabwe one in performance that ended up igniting debate on economic, political and social issues affecting the two countries. The hashtag #MyPresidentMyChoice was also an equivalence frame. The hashtag was premised on the fact that Kenyans were feeling dissatisfied by President Uhuru's style of leadership and expressed lots of opinions on social media sites. This hashtag was formed to counter those opinions by expressing the opinions of those who support him versus those who do not. The one special trait in the Kenyan equivalence frames is that contrary to the frames explained by Entman (2004) that are about gains and losses or risks and opportunities, the Kenyan hashtags do not show these distinctions clearly as can be seen in the examples given. The comparison will only be seen in the debate based on the context or issue regime.

Frames can also be negative or positive depending on the wording of the message (Kuypers, 2009). When put negatively frames depict lack of support over a certain issue. In the Kenyan scenario the negative hashtags were those that portrayed anger, disapproval and demands over certain sociopolitical issues. Hashtags like #HotBedOfTerror, #RapeDoctor and #PastorOfImpunity all have negative frames. In total the negative frames were 23 while the positive ones were 12. This can be inferred to mean that hashtags are being used as a form of resistance to vices meted against Wanjiku. Hashtags are a way of raising the voice of the voiceless. Positive hashtags identified mostly entertained or raised issues in a moderate hilarious

manner. Examples include #OchollaMoment, #UhuruVisitsKenya, #TeamMafisi and #BabaWhileYouWereAway which attracted a lot of hilarious tweets from KOT.

The table below gives a summary of the distribution of the hashtags in terms of the types of frames used by the hashtag creators.

**Table 4.4: Types of Frames**

Type of frame	Thought	Communication	Emphasis	Equivalence	Positive	Negative
No. of Hashtags	35	35	29	6	12	23
s						

This distribution indicates that Kenyans use more emphasis frames than equivalence frames in hashtags. This means that in most cases the aim is to highlight issues in the society that require attention other than just general discussions. The negatively framed hashtags were also more than the positive ones since the hashtags are a form of discursive resistance that shows public dislike of certain issues propagated or overlooked by the ruling class. A hashtag like #StopTheDrunkPresident is negatively framed to decry the desperation of Kenyans in the hands of a president perceived to be insensitive to their needs. This hashtag was countered by bloggers associated with the government creating the hashtag #MyPresidentMyChoice which mimicked previous hashtag #MyDressMyChoice.

Framing of messages serves various purposes and core tasks including diagnosing problems, making moral judgement, suggesting solutions and calling for action. This is done during the framing effort according to Snow, et al (1988) and Kuypers, 2010). The research findings agree with this view on frame analysis. Through content analysis, the hashtags were listed and from the wording, the researcher was able to categorize them in terms of the tasks they were meant to accomplish. The

table below shows that majority of the 35 hashtags formulated by Kenyans were used to make moral judgement or identify problems and the minority were used to suggest solutions or call for action. This means that Kenyans use hashtags to raise issues online and allow dialogue around them especially those that affect the society negatively.

**Table 4.5: Core Task of a Hashtag Frame**

<b>Hashtag Purpose</b>	<b>Number of hashtags</b> <b>N=35</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Identifying Problems	11	31.4%
Making Moral Judgement	15	42.9%
Call for Action	5	14.3%
Suggesting Solution	4	11.4%

#### **4.5.1.2 Lexicon Choice of Hash tag**

A message begins from an idea in the mind of the communicator. This message is communicated through words. The words that a person chooses in passing a particular message determine the meaning that the respondent interprets. Scheufelle (1999) says that framing of messages relies a lot on wording and syntax. Thus, the hashtag developer must deliberately choose words so as to capture attention. Hashtags have few words that must create interest and trend online (Zappavigna, 2017). To determine the influence of lexicon choice on the formation of public opinion, the researcher relied on the data collected from the respondents since word choice is done by hashtag creators. Respondents were asked to indicate the factors that they consider when framing a hashtag. The findings were that words should capture interest, have emotional appeal, be simple not jargon and capture a current theme. These responses were given majority of the respondents. That is 32 of the respondents, translating to 89% of the 36 respondents.

Some of the responses given by journalists were:

Participant 1: *The words must be simple with very few characters. This will help to capture the message.*

Participant 3: *The hashtag must be short. It must also be original, not from another media house. The words must be able to give emotional appeal and be informative. Also no vulgar language is used.*

Participant 7: *The topic informs the words. Words must also show objectivity and adhere to journalists' code of conduct.*

Participant 4: *We consider the length of the hashtag and its appeal to the audience.*

Participant 10: *The wording must be unique and have clarity.*

The researcher also sought to know if the KOT's developed hashtags even as they consumed the ones already formulated and trending and what factors they put into consideration when framing a hashtag. The answers given by the respondents included:

Participant 1: *The wording has to be simple so that the general public can remember it. The words must also create an impact to the people.*

Participant 12: *I consider factors like the number of responses am likely to get; the influence the hashtag can cause; what is trending on Twitter at the moment; and the number of people it will affect.*

Participant 9: *I take into consideration the popularity of the theme message to be taken across; current issues; publicity for the event or course; and my followers ability to understand it.*

The independent hashtag developers were also asked to give factors they consider when coming up with a hashtag. They responded as follows:

Participant 1: *The most important thing is to create interest. Do not reveal too much in the hashtag. Lead the user on to learn more and participate. It also has to be short*

*and memorable. It is important to remember that the online user has a very short concentration span. This makes the whole idea of creating hashtags very memorable. Stand out.*

*Participant 2: The words must be catchy and emotive. The hashtag should be short and concise. The words must also be about current affairs to create interest.*

From these responses it is clear that the choice of words for a hashtag takes centre stage. The respondents agree on some factors like the clarity and simplicity of hashtags to capture interest of the majority of online users. Another common factor is the emotional appeal which some respondents are referring to as words being catchy. It is also noted that the topic dictates the choice of words. These factors besides influencing the words chosen in the hashtags also direct the interpretive frames. The issue of words having emotional appeal and being easy to remember refers to how the target audience interprets the meaning in them.

These findings are in agreement with those of other scholars including Jensen, 2012; Jensen, 1998; Newman, 1992; and Scheufele, 1999. They all argue that audiences rely on categories that are largely derived from personal experiences to make sense of unfamiliar concepts and events in news media. These interpretive frames may be different from the ones that journalists rely on. Hashtags are formulated around events and issues occurring around the target audience. The wording must be familiar and direct the audience to the target issue. Almost all the hashtags sampled showed this characteristic. Examples of the hashtags showing emotional appeal and direct reference to issue are #147IsNotJustANumber, #DepotRutoPilot, #MyDressMyChoice and #ObamaReturns. Some hashtags sampled were however not direct on the issue and the respondents could be seen trying to get the meaning of key words. Examples are the hashtags #DeadBeatKenya and #SomeoneTellCNN. The hashtag #DeadBeatKenya expected the respondent to understand the concept of a dead beat father, something that most of the tweeps were not aware of at first. The debate on the same however led to a huge response after the audience captured the meaning. The interpretive frame in this case was negotiated through back and forth

tweeting. Jensen (1998) says this is because audiences generally employ generalized and common sense super themes to establish meaningful links between their world and the world of news.

In order to check how words capture interest, the respondents were asked to indicate the emotive score they would give on lexicon choice of hash tags. The scores were between 1 and 10. A score of 10 represented the highest score while 1 represented the lowest score. These scores were meant to address how emotional they feel from the wording of the hashtags. All the 35 hashtags were read aloud the respondents and they would then indicate a score between 1 and 10 depending on how they feel. This scale was based on Leaf and Bernard's Program for Open-Ended Scoring (POES) that is used to measure the Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale (LEAS). The results showed that the average score of lexicon choice was 5.7857. The standard deviation was 1.484 and this means that there was a wide range of the lexicon scores given from the mean. The minimum score on lexicon choice indicated was 3 and the maximum score on lexicon choice was 8. This means that the respondents gave a high emotive score on lexicon choice of hash tags. This can be interpreted to mean that hashtags with emotional appeal were more influential in opinion formation.

**Table 4.6: Lexicon Choice of Hashtag**

Scale	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lexicon choice (emotive score)	35	3	8	5.7857	1.484

To further understand if the words used had any effect on whether the hashtag appealed to the audience or not, the KOT were asked what made them respond to a hashtag. Their responses were:

Participant 5: *I react to a hashtag depending on the topic; if it relates to my personal life; if the hashtag is likely to affect me, friends or relatives; and when I want to get information on issues affecting the country.*

Participant 4: *I react if it affects me personally even indirectly. Also depends on how popular it is.*

Participant 10: *The relevance of that hashtag to me.*

Participant 7: *Repetition. Retweets create more interest. Also if it is made into a meme within my social grouping like WhatsApp or Instagram, it's more captivating. Also used for issue awareness. That is if it is about something I know or is within my knowledge scope.*

Participant 5: *I respond to hashtags that I feel are beneficial like missing persons e.g. #BringBackOurGirls. Also, those that are for entertainment and creating awareness such as #ALSChallenge. ALS is a rare but dangerous disease.*

The respondents were also asked what kind of hashtags they do not respond to and why. The responses included:

Participant 12: *Highly politicized ones. I have no care for politics of division.*

Participant 9: *Those that have a monotonous title; are beyond my knowledge scope; those irrelevant to my life; and those that are too long.*

Participant 3: *Political ones especially those that have redundant themes like speaking of change that never is.*

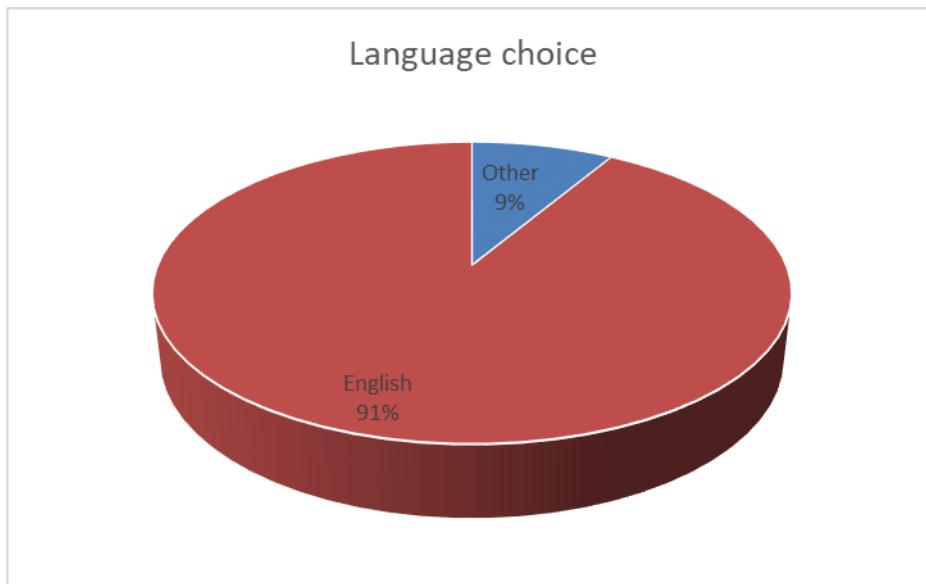
Participant 4: *I do not respond to topics that do not pick my interest e.g. #WengerOut.*

Participant 11: *I do not respond to hashtags that sound trivial and any with negative or hatred nuances. I view them as inciting.*

The theme of the hashtag is deduced from the wording or choice of lexicon. This is what would make one respond or not respond depending on whether the words raise interest or not. From these responses it is apparent that the choice of words is directly related to the level of response towards a hashtag. The consumers of hashtags seem to prefer moderately worded hashtags in terms of simplicity and neutrality of opinions. For instance, negatively worded hashtags according to the respondents do not seem to capture interest as compared to those that appeal for a common human course like illness. This is in agreement with Chong and Druckman (2007) who contend that frames in communication organize everyday reality by providing meaning to an unfolding strip of events and promoting particular interpretation of issues.

#### **4.5.1.3 Language Choice of Hash tag**

Language choice in any message within a communication event is one of the aspects considered during framing (Entman, 2004). The researcher first listed the 35 hashtags sampled then counted the ones that were framed in English and the ones framed in other languages or a mixture of English and Kiswahili which fall under the category others. 31 of the hashtags were in English and 4 were in other languages specifically a mixture of English and Kiswahili. The results are shown in Figure 4.1 which revealed that most hash tags, that is, 91% were in English while only 9% were in other languages.



**Figure 4.1: Language Choice of Hashtags**

This implies that most hashtags are in English language. Twitter being an online social media platform is associated with the elite with a majority being English speakers. Pew Research Centre of Internet Technology 2016 statistics show that Twitter users are mostly highly educated with 29% of them having college degrees as compared to 20% of those users who have high school education or less. It is from the onset a news platform and not purely centred on entertainment. Most of the users around the globe use the international lingua franca, English. From the results, it is clear that Kenya is no exception. However, Kiswahili is quickly catching up in the hashtag culture especially in politics and business. Examples of such hashtags are #LipaKamaTender (gloss: *pay just like you pay tenderpreneurs*) that was used by doctors to push the government to pay them; #UhuruNiWetu (Gloss: *President Uhuru is our son*) and #WaremoNaUhuru (Gloss: *Ladies for President Uhuru*) for the 2017 presidential campaign; #LipaDeni (Gloss: *Pay your debts*) that was developed for a local firm to show the need for people to pay loans; #TembeaKenya (Gloss: *Tour Kenya*) a tourism campaign hashtag meant to promote domestic tourism encouraging Kenyans to know and appreciate their own heritage and beauty; the more recent one #IfikieWazazi, that was formulated to highlight moral decadence of

teens online after a group of high school students posted nude pictures of themselves on various social media. The respondents who gave these examples argued that these hashtags are meant to have a wider reach and so Kiswahili being the unifying language in Kenya is appropriate. The findings also indicated that most tweeps would mix both English and Kiswahili in their tweets as seen in these examples:

Jay Jay @jumajimtrix 27 Oct 2015

@Alex Mwakideu my ocholla moment nilitext maboys Leo tunalewa na wasichana wangapi ikaenda kwa my mum #OchollaMoment @JalangoMwenyewe

1 retweet 1 like

Doctrine Ridge @KhufuSphinx May 17

When mluya wa #Bungoma said ana dandia tu kama ma3 you thought it was just punchline. #BungomaJamesBond

Though most consumers and producers of hashtags are youths, Sheng' does not appear to be a code that is preferred in the production of hashtags. This code is widespread in urban areas in Kenya and the researcher investigated if there would be any hashtag that is coded in Sheng'. The absence of this code again indicates that hashtags are constructed and used in line with the international code and practice.

English language dominance in the internet has been studied by scholars especially in relation to users who may not speak English as a first language. This agrees with a study by Yate (1996b) who looked at the dominance of the English language on the internet and the possible effects of this dominance on the global spread of U.S. values and cultural practices. The language chosen by speakers and their attitude towards it shows the position the other languages may hold in the minds and practice of speakers. Paolillo (1996) explains that local languages would fare better in the internet if computer networks were located within the locality and if the concerned country had no colonial ties with the dominating country. The use of English by Kenyans is in line with the findings of this research. Kenya has colonial ties with Britain, an English-speaking country. According to Yoon (2001), young people in Korea accepted the dominance and importance of English without question due to

the fact that the symbolic power of technology fueled by commercially driven mass media is associated with the English language. Therefore, the English language is hegemoniously approved in the Internet and Kenya is no exception. The emerging issue here is that Kiswahili language is rarely used alone to construct hashtags.

Another finding of this research was the tendency of code-mixing in Kenyan hashtags where Kiswahili and English are used in one hashtag. Code mixing is the use of two or more languages (codes) in a sentence (Gumperz, 1982). The hashtag seems to adopt code mixing as a linguistic feature. Framing the hashtag this way seems to give Kiswahili a place. Out of the 35 hashtags sampled, 3 had this feature where English and Kiswahili were used in the same hashtag. Kenyans, especially the youth have a tendency of mixing Kiswahili and English in speech and electronic writing such as in SMS communication. An example is #TwendeTukavote (Gloss: *Let us go vote*). This is also in the hashtags #BabaWhileYouWereAway, #LipaKamaTender and #PambazukaNationalLottery. The use of code switching, henceforth CS, in communication seems to play certain roles such as message qualification as is the case with #BabaWhileYouWereAway. Some of these hashtags use CS to emphasize certain issues in society. An example would be #SystemYaMjambazi created by KOT opposed to President Uhuru's government over corruption scandals and its counter hashtag #SystemYaFacts created by KOT in support of Uhuru's Jubilee government who felt that the opposition always opposed issues without facts. Thus, CS also serves to emphasize a point and reiterate the same. In cases of highly emotive discussions CS indicates these emotions.

The use of CS to achieve these functions is collaborated by findings from online communication research of various scholars. Such studies include Halim and Maros (2014) who studied CS in Facebook interactions by Malay-English speakers. The findings indicated that CS occurs in online interactions to serve quotations, addressee specifications, reiteration, message qualification, clarification emphasis, checking, indicating emotions, availability, principle of economy and free switching functions. Das (2013) did a research on code mixing in social media texts and concluded that CM (code mixing) and CS mainly occur to mark in-group membership. In the

Kenyan scenario, in-group membership is broader, indicating a national (Kenyan) way of speaking that involves the habit of mixing English and Kiswahili even in formal speech. This study therefore differs with those findings in terms of the role and scope of CS for group communication and identity.

On being asked about language choice in hashtags, one respondent, an independent hashtag developer responded:

*“The use of Kiswahili in hashtags is rare as hashtags are predominantly not a Kenyan thing. However there is a new trend of customers choosing Kiswahili to have a wider reach. This is the reason we came up with hashtags #LipaDeni, #MamasSpecial and #PambazukaNationalLottery”*

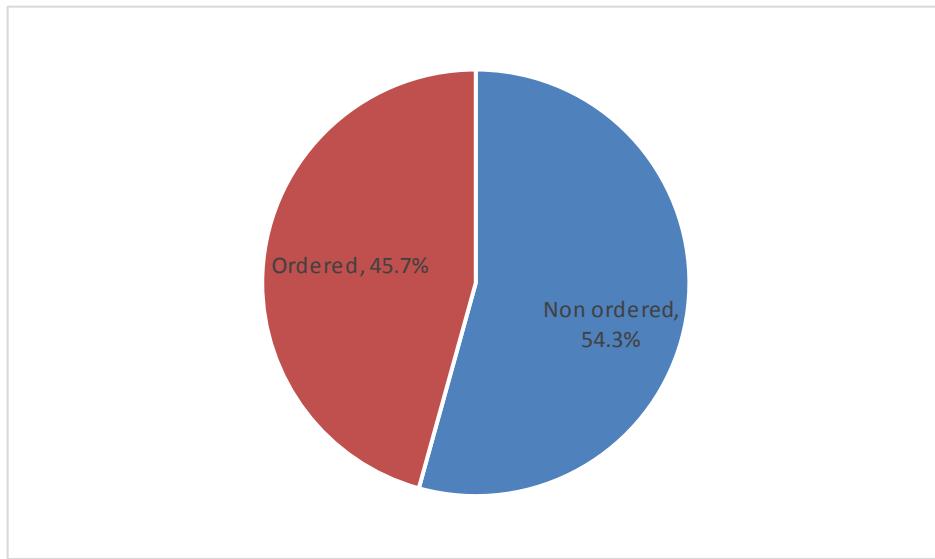
Based on the answers given by respondents and the number of hashtags using English and other languages, the results are also explained statistically. Results can either be significant or insignificant. Statistically significant is the likelihood that a relationship between two or more variables is caused by something other than random chance. The study used p-values to explain the significance of the results. Results are said to be significant if the P – value is less than 0.05 (Bland & Altman, 1995). The results in table 4.4 indicated that language choice had a significant influence on public opinion (P-value = 0.004). This is because the probability value (P-value = 0.004) was less than the critical p value (p –value =0.05). This implies that the choice of language to use in framing hash tags has an impact on formation of public opinion on social political issues. The standard deviation for both hash tags formulated in English and other languages were less than 1 and this implied that the answers given by the responses were not wide spread from the mean.

**Table 4.7: Language Choice of Hash tag**

	Language choice( English=1 Other= 0)	N	Std.		
			Mean	Deviation	(p-Value)
Public					
Opinion	Other	3	3.8761	0.5457	
	English	32	5.8903	0.5978	<b>(0.004)</b>

#### 4.5.1.4 Grammatical Structure of Hash tag

Zappavigna (2017) explains that one of the grammatical features of a hashtag the world over, is that it does not follow the normal order of words in a sentence, for instance the markers of speech are usually missing. Also the subject verb object agreement may be missing. The researcher analyzed the grammatical structure of the hashtags by counting those hashtags that followed the usual subject verb object (SVO) or object verb subject (OVS) syntactical order as acceptable in the English language since the majority of the hashtags were in English and those that deviated from these had code mixing. Robins (2007) says that the most common word order in English is SVO where the first noun in the sentence is the subject and the second noun is the object. The grammaticality of the sentence is not based on word arrangement however but on how these words eventually form phrases (Fabb, 2005). Basing on the grammatical structure of the hashtags, the researcher counted those that were ordered and those that defied syntactical order of words in a phrase. Of the 35 hashtags, 19 were ordered while 16 were non-ordered. This translates to 54.3% and 47.7% respectively as shown in the figure below.



**Figure 4.2: Grammatical Structure of Hash tag**

The results in Figure 4.2 revealed that most hash tags which were 54.3% were ordered while only 45.7% were non-ordered. This implies that most hash tags are ordered. In addition, the difference in numbers is small. Meaning the order of elements did not matter in determining popularity of a hashtag. These hashtags also do not obey punctuation rules. For example every word is capitalized and there is no spacing. One of the grammatical features of a hashtag the world over, is that it does not follow the normal order of words in a sentence, for instance the markers of speech are usually missing (Zappavigna, 2017). Also the subject verb object agreement may be missing. Examples are: #DepotRutoPilot; #MyDressMyChoice; #UhuruDabChallenge.

Hashtags that showed some grammatical order include: #HotBedOfTerror, #BabaWhileYouWereAway, #147IsNotJustANumber, #IStandWithKDF, #StopTheDrunkPresident and #UhuruVisitsKenya. What is observed in these hashtags is that instead of spacing between words in the clause or phrase, capitalization of each word is employed. This is a special marker used only in hashtags as a genre. This grammatical structure of hashtags follows the universal structure that has come to distinguish this genre of communication. This is in

agreement with the findings of a study by Das (2013) who says that SM texts exhibit many challenges in language use such as a high percentage of typing errors, creative spellings like *gr8 for great*, phonetic typing and word play such as *soooo saaaaad* for *so sad*, abbreviations like LoL (laugh out loud) and ION (in other news), as well as metatags like URLs and hashtags.

Results can either be significant or insignificant. Statistically significant is the likelihood that a relationship between two or more variables is caused by something other than random chance. The study used p-values to explain the significance of the results. Results are said to be significant if the P – value is less than 0.05 (Bland & Altman, 1995). The results in Table 4.3 which were based on answers by respondents indicated that grammatical structure had an insignificant influence on public opinion (P-value = 0.468). This was supported by the probability value (P-value = 0.468) which was more than the critical p value (p –value =0.05). ). This means that grammatical structure of a hash tag does not have any impact on the formation of public opinion on social political issues. The standard deviation of non-ordered hash tags was less than 1 (0.5889) implying that the answers of the respondents were not wide spread from the mean (5.098). The standard deviation of ordered hash tags was less than 1 (0.6123) implying that the answers of the respondents were not wide spread from the mean (5.765).

**Table 4.8: Grammatical Structure of Hash tag**

			Std.	Deviatio		
		Grammatical structure (ordered =1, non-ordered=0)	N	Mean	n	P-Value
<b>Public</b>	<b>Opinion</b>	<b>Non ordered</b>	16	5.098	0.5789	
		<b>Ordered</b>	19	5.765	0.6123	<b>(0.468)</b>

The results above indicate that the grammatical structure of a hash tag does not have any impact on the formation of public opinion on social political issues. Previous

research by scholars of computer mediated discourse (CMD) and computer mediated language (CML) indicate that the language used in this form of discourse portrays a lot of grammatical errors. Herring (2015) says that research has revealed that CML is sensitive to a variety of technical and even situational factors making it more complex. The popular perception is that CML is less correct and less coherent. Baron (1984) predicted that participants in computer conferences would use fewer subordinate clauses and a narrower range of vocabulary and as a result the expressive functions of language could be diminished. This study refutes these claims as most of the tweets exhibit coherence and proper language command. The use of short forms in the hashtags seems to obey the conventions of online discourse where the number of characters allowed in a post may be less than the fully expressive sentence. This finding is in agreement with Herring (2015) who says that although CML may contain non-standard features only a relatively small percentage of such features are a result of lack of attention or knowledge of the standard forms. Majority of these errors are a deliberate choice meant to minimize typing time and effort, mimic spoken language features or express them creatively. For instance, tweets under some hashtags were found to use textual representation of auditory information such as prosody, laughter, facial expressions and other paralinguistic features. One practical example is the presentation of laughter in the following tweets:

3 retweets 4 likes

**Ahmed Mohamed @asmali77** May 15

HaHaHa. Nani huyo? Wetangula is the **#BungomaJamesBond?**

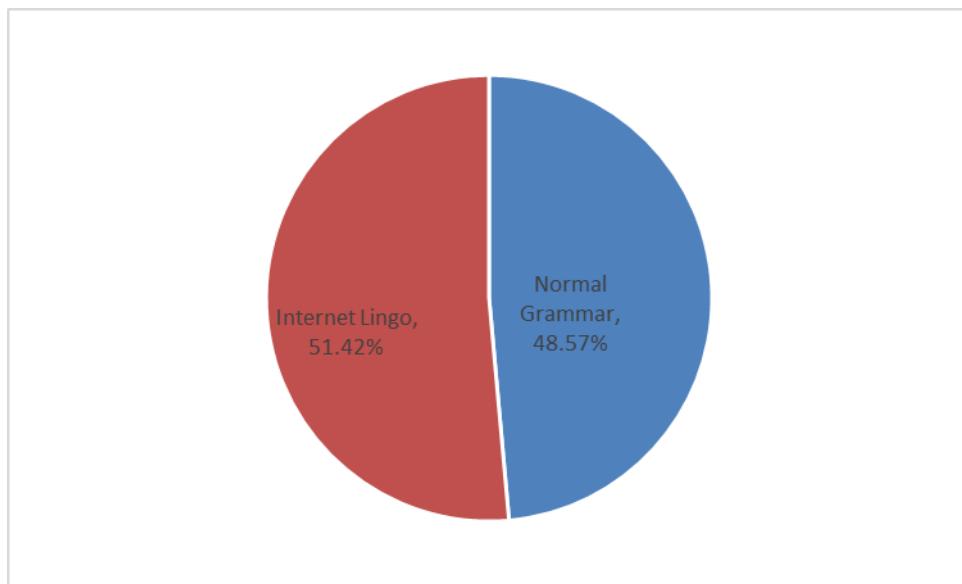
**Prometheus MBS @Kenribs** 29 Oct 2014

Hahahaha, ati Omondi the Artist has found himself in **#DeadbeatKenya**

This can be taken as a communication strategy that demonstrates the ability of tweeps to adapt to the computer medium in expressing themselves other than just poor grammar or simplified information. The result of this kind of communication is language use that allows orality in written texts.

#### **4.5.1.5 Code of Hash tag**

The code used in a message may determine how effective a frame becomes (Zappavigna, 2012). This code of the hashtag could be normal grammar or internet lingo. Content analysis was used to determine how many hashtags used internet lingo and how many used normal grammar. The 35 hashtags were listed and categorized under these two features. Out of the 35 hashtags, 18 were framed in internet lingo and 17 were framed using normal grammar. The results in Figure 4.3 below showed that most hash tags which were 51.42% were in internet lingo while only 48.57% were in normal grammar.



**Figure 4.3: Code of Hashtag**

Internet lingo in this case refers to shortened and unordered forms where word choice is based on the objective of capturing interest (Zappavigna, 2017). Hashtags seem to totally ignore the use of punctuation, lexicon arrangement and interaction while focusing on key words that capture interest of social media users quickly. An example is #RapeDoctor, #DepotRutoPilot. The hashtags have no spacing in between words neither are there conjunctions or other grammatical marks.

The use of short clauses or single words as a way of simplifying communication is supported by the findings of Zappavigna (2017) who looked at the linguistic functions of hashtags in tweets and found that tweeps embed metadata in posts through tagging to allow one to find out what people are talking about in real time. The study says that hashtags emerged via micro blogging, the practice of publishing short, character-constrained posts to ambient audiences before spreading to other media. Moreover, the choice of words, sentence structure and the length of the hashtag determine how influential the hashtag is to the public. This is the character portrayed by Kenyan hashtags. This study agrees with Halliday (1978) about linguistic metafunctions of a hashtag such as marking experiential topics, enacting interpersonal relationships and organizing text. Some hashtags however follow the normal grammatical rules though the words are few and easy to grasp for instance, #IStandWithKDF and, #147IsNotJustANumber. These findings are in agreement with those of Kehoe and Gee (2014), who see hashtags as topic markers indicating the aboutness of a social media text. For instance, #KenyansVsZimbabweans already indicates the direction of the online conversations. In collaboration, Brock (2012) says that the existence of a hashtagged message via twitter actively invites audiences' attention by setting parameters for embedded discourse. In essence, such texts invoke histories, context, emotions and a call for action.

To further examine the influence of the code of the hashtag and if the hashtags formulators actually considered the code to use, the interviewees were asked a few questions. The respondents were asked to indicate what factors they consider when formulating hash tags. The hashtag developers raised factors like the choice of words, length of the statement making the hashtag and use of emotive forms so that the hashtag becomes memorable. These words had to be presented in a particular language and for some the hashtag reached more ordinary Kenyans if it was in Kiswahili. This is what informed the choice of language in #LipaKamaTender. The doctors wanted more Kenyans to understand their plea. That a non-emergency issue, like paying tender cartels, was given priority yet the doctor who treats the ordinary Kenyan had been ignored. The choice of words and language which eventually

determines whether it is normal grammar or internet lingo in hashtags therefore matters. A good case of word choice using internet lingo is #SaltBae. The “bae” word eventually led to formation of so many hashtags under it by Kenyans and other netizens including #AvocadoIsBae and #Chilobae.

The following are some of the responses from the interviewees:

Participant 16: *Has to be short and memorable. It is also important to remember that the online user has a very short attention span making it very competitive*

Participant 2: *Target audience (How do they speak? What everyone can relate to. If you want to make it trend think of how many ways you can use.*

Participant 13: *Choice of Lingo –think audience for example Kiswahili penetrates better among less educated people in Kenya*

Participant 5: *Keep it short and catchy, for example, #ItsBig –lottery for all Kenyans –what is big? It's coming? What is it?*

The code of communication in the hashtags seems deliberate. The hashtags have a different character from normal sentence wherever they are formed. The use of symbols like @ and # seems to replace words. Instead of directly addressing the addressee in a message the @ symbol is used. In the hashtag #Rogue Pastor, the recipient of the message in this tweet is Cedrick Todwell who George Mugendi is responding to.

In reply to Cedrick Todwell

george mugendi @george mugendi 10 Aug 2015

@Ctodwell @C NyaKundiH No use buying #RoguePastor dictionary or grammar book as he can't read anyway. Buy him an alphabet chart first

0 retweets 0 likes

A sentence presented in normal grammar in an ordinary conversation would probably have been: *C. Todwell and C. Nyakundi, there is no need of buying the rogue pastor a dictionary or grammar book as he cannot read. Buy him an alphabet chart first.*

In the hashtags and tweets analyzed one can deduce the aspects of framing that are involved in the hashtag formulation. The hashtags are using carefully selected words, which are meant to capture the attention of tweeps. The hashtags also do not seem to follow the normal grammatical structure especially conjunctions and affixation while using the internet lingo. Examples of internet lingo are use of special vocabulary and statements like *I can't/kent, body shaming, trolling*: use of abbreviations such as LOL, LMAO, TBT, WCW, TIA, etc. Every respondent interviewed revealed that they put specific factors into consideration more especially the topic or issue regime, timing and the wording.

These results were also summarized statistically to show the influence of the code of a hashtag. The results indicate that the number of hashtags using internet lingo and those using normal grammar was almost equal. Results can either be significant or insignificant. Statistically significant is the likelihood that a relationship between two or more variables is caused by something other than random chance. The study used p-values obtained from answers given by respondents in relation to code of hashtag to explain the significance of the results. Results are said to be significant if the P – value is less than 0.05 (Bland & Altman, 1995). The results in able 4.4 indicated that code of hashtags did not have a significant influence on public opinion (P-value = 0.454). This was also supported by the probability value (P-value = 0.454) which was more than the critical p value (p –value =0.05). This means that code of hash tags does not have a great influence on the formation of public opinion on social political issues. The standard deviation of hash tags in formed in normal grammar was less than 1 (0.51234) implying that the answers of the respondents were not wide spread from the mean (5.304). The standard deviation of hash tags in formed in normal grammar was less than 1 (0.60457) implying that the answers of the respondents were not wide spread from the mean (5.453). The findings agree with

those of Gearhart & Kang (2014) study which concluded that in Twitter comments using internet lingo were received more favorably than normal grammar comments.

**Table 4.9: Code of Hash tag**

	Code (Internet lingo=1, Normal grammar=0)	Std.		n	p-Value
		N	Mean		
<b>Public</b>					
<b>Opinion</b>	Normal Grammar	17	5.304	0.51234	
	Internet Lingo	18	5.453	0.60457	0.454

#### **4.5.1.6 Hypothesis Testing for Framing of Hash Tags**

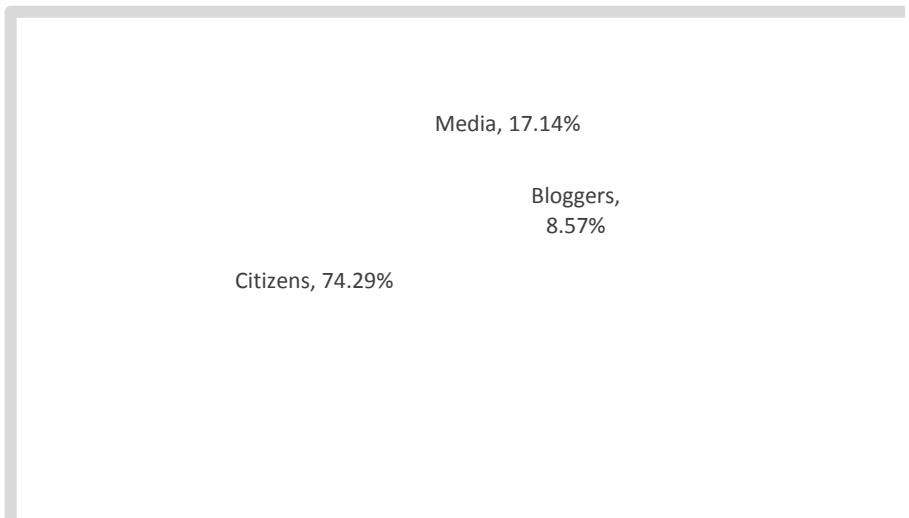
The hypothesis was tested by using t - test. The acceptance-rejection criteria was that, if the p value is greater than 0.05, the  $H_0$  is not rejected but if it's less than 0.05, the  $H_0$  fails to be accepted. The null hypothesis was that there is no significant relationship between framing of Hash tag and formation of public opinion. Results in Table 4.4, Table 4.6, Table 4.7 and Table 4.8 on various concepts of framing shown above show that the p-value was  $0.000 < 0.05$ . This indicated that the null hypothesis was rejected hence there is a significant relationship between framing of Hash tag and formation of public opinion.

In summary, the findings on framing suggest that the hashtags are not formulated without taking into consideration the frames of communication (how the hashtag will communicate the message) and the frames of thought (how the target audience will interpret the message). These findings concur with Chong and Druckman (2007) who say that a strong frame is one that emerges from public discussions as the best rationale for contending positions on the issue because these are the frames that strike opinion leaders and audiences as being more compelling than alternative arguments. Thus the formulation of a hashtag must capture the public's attention so that there is online discussion of the issue at hand and therefore an opinion about it may be propagated on the same platform. Kuypers (2009) contends that in setting the frame of communication one must consider the applicability effect. The more

audiences know about an issue the easier it will be for them to apply that schema in understanding it hence making the frames effective. The Kenyan hashtags are premised on real time sociopolitical issues some of which are featured as news items before the public forms hashtags or are raised by members of the public in online platforms. The hashtag #RapeDoctor was formed after the story of a quack practicing gynecology in a private clinic in Nairobi was featured in national television stations causing a public uproar. Even before the hashtag was created the public had knowledge on the issue.

#### **4.5.2 Hashtag Actors on the Formation of Public Opinion**

The second objective was to explain the influence of the hashtag actors on the formation of public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya. The actors in this research refer to the producers and consumers of the hashtags. These roles are frequently exchanged. The traditional role of creating messages in the media was always taken by media practitioners. The researcher investigated who the actors were and what role they played in the Twitter discourse of Kenyan socio-political issues. The actors (hashtag creators and respondents) varied from ordinary citizens to professional bloggers to political agents (who developed hashtags on behalf of the government to counter public ones) to celebrities and media personalities. To establish the actors in the hashtag discourse, the researcher streamed the 35 hashtags and the tweets under them using Twitter API software and Survey Monkey. Using content analysis the hashtags were categorized according to source by checking the identity of the person who first posted the hashtag. The hashtags were then put in three categories; those created by media, then those created by Wanjiku and those created by bloggers. From this classification, the findings were that out of the 35 hashtags, 26 were formulated by Wanjiku, 6 by media practitioners and 3 by bloggers. This translates to 74.29% of hashtags being created by Wanjiku, 17.14% by the media and 8.57% by bloggers. The figure below shows this distribution:



**Figure 4.4: Hash tag Actors**

The term actors in this research referred to both the creators of the hashtags and the respondents since the roles were frequently exchanged. For instance, some hashtags were created by Wanjiku and the respondents to those hashtags were the media practitioners who featured the hashtags during news and other ordinary Kenyans and politicians who responded to them online. #HurumaTragedy was created by the media, specifically K24, and immediately went viral and was eventually adopted by other media houses when reporting on the tragedy of a collapsed building in Huruma. #DepotRutoPilot and #ArrestRutoPilot were both developed by KOT but ended up being featured in the news with both media and public responding to them. The respondents to these hashtags were established by the researcher from the tweets and retweets data streamed directly from Twitter. The TV stations also featured trending hashtags and the researcher was able to list them during news broadcast.

To establish the role of actors in hashtag formulation and response, the researcher conducted interviews with the 22 journalists, 10 KOT and 4 commercial developers to compliment what was observed from the tweets. The respondents in the media (journalists) were asked if their media houses use hashtags. They all answered ‘yes’,

to that question. They were then asked to state how they use the hashtags that they create. Some of their responses were:

Participant 20: *We have hashtags for every bulletin or coverage. Basically every programme has a hashtag. For instance we have hashtags for 9 p.m. news from Monday to Friday, that is K24EveningEdition and over the weekends it is #K24WeekendEdition. Other programs use hashtags as well, e.g. #Arena254 for entertainment. We use them for live coverage such as political rallies and other important events like #StateOfTheNation, used during President Uhuru's state of the nation address. These hashtags help us to engage viewers and get their opinion on issues.*

Participant 7: *Media practitioners use hashtags to interact with viewers or followers. Hashtags have become very common. The hashtags are used depending on the programme or event. They can be used for news, entertainment, education, sports, or any other content so long as it has drawn interest from many people.*

Participant 5: *In Citizen, we use hashtags when there is an important event, like for example, the #DevolutionConference. The hashtags are based on news shows for instance, #JKFLive, #CitizenExtra, #Cheche and #PowerBreakfast. Hashtags are also used in entertainment programmes like #10Over10.*

Participant 10: *Media practitioners use hashtags to a very large extent. Hashtags drive conversations. It is easier to follow and engage in a topic through a hashtag. We use hashtags during news, entertainment and general content. An example is #NewsHour.*

Participant 11: *Yes we use the hashtags to a very high extent to make news or programmes trend. Examples of programmes using hashtags are #News Centre, #MorningExpress and #YouthCafe.*

The respondents were further asked to indicate whether there are any hashtags that their media houses generated and were able to get national attention. 19 of the 22

respondents indicated ‘yes’. They agreed that the public provided news stories and enhanced the media stories and features by positively responding to hashtag. It is the public that decides whether a hashtag trends or not. The following are some of the responses:

Participant 1: *Yes. #KCSE2016Results*

Participant 6: *Yes. TechWomenUSIU and #FeelLoveFriday.*

Participant 14: *Yes we formulate hashtags on a daily basis. I formulated #NASAInBomet which brought immense audience interaction. Also, #FreeJoyDoreen, about a journalist who had been arrested and detained in Uganda.*

Participant 18: *Yes I have created many trending hashtags. Examples are #ProjectGalana, #DoctorsReleased, #BudgetInsight and #TradingBell.*

Participant 15: *We came up with the hashtag #ObamaReturns that really trended and was adopted by other media houses.*

Participant 6: ‘*Yes, e.g. #ElephantMan (an ordinary citizen who supplied water to elephants in the Tsavo) .The station took up the # and did a story. The public informs the media about current happenings.’*

Participant 8: *Since hashtags are popularized by the public, their use by media houses goes a long way in reaching out and connecting with the audience.*

From these responses, the researcher established that media practitioners create and also use hashtags from other media houses. This can be compared to how media stations sometimes share news sources for important national events or occurrences and it only shows that hashtags are not just for entertainment in the media houses’ programming.

The respondents were further asked to indicate whether it matters who formulates the hashtag as far as its popularity rating is concerned. The following were the responses:

Participant 4: '*Partly. If one is popular then it takes a shorter time to get people to participate in your cause. Otherwise, if it is a matter close to the hearts of many Kenyans, then it doesn't matter who starts it, for example #WestgateAttack or #RIPSaitoti. In this case, the first person to share it creates the breaking news and from there the communication goes viral. However, if the campaign is leaning towards commercial objectives, then you need someone (or a team) with considerable influence to drive your message.*

Participant 12: '*Yes, the source matters.' If one does not have a large following, it won't pick up. E.g. are your followers followed? Retweeting is important.'*

The respondents were asked to indicate whether media houses always formulate the hashtags and if there are times when the journalists have adopted hashtags formulated by members of the public. 20 out of the 22 respondents which translate to 90.9% indicated that there are times the journalists have adopted hashtags formulated by members of the public. The reasons given were mostly about the public-formulated hashtags getting highly popularized that they become a news item of the day. In fact, media houses now have specific programmes where they air trending hashtags and what Kenyans 'googled' most over the week. The media houses also have online journalists who most of them refer to as the digital team. The following are some of the responses:

Participant 17: '*Not always. Sometimes media houses adopt other hashtags from the public. E.g. #LipaKamaTender'*

Participant 18: '*Yes. When media houses need to verify certain breaking news, they may adopt hashtags from the public.'*

Participant 3: '*I am not sure'*

Participant 4: '*Sometimes'*

Media personalities interviewed were of the opinion that even though Kenyans create hashtags over issues that find their way into news rooms sometimes, the public still

relies on media for verification and authentication of the news. The media still retains its role of providing accurate information to the public despite the insurgence of social media networks where citizens make and get news.

One journalist explained this thus: *There are many news sources including what is popularly referred to as gutter press that give news and other information online. Our rating as media houses continues to rise because the public still comes back to us to verify the news. Even if the first place they read breaking news is Twitter they still search for the news on our walls and other online platforms. So, then the media uses the public as a news source especially for important events like tragedies but we must verify them before going on air. The public knows this.*

The respondents (media personalities) were further asked to indicate the hashtags they have formulated and which in their opinion have been successful. The successful hashtags in this context were those that gained national attention and trended for a period of time. Journalists also measured the success of a hashtag by considering if the hashtags were able to elicit a response from the government. The following are some of the responses.

Participant

17: '#HurumaTragedy#ManderaAttack.#StateoftheNation.#SpeaktoDpRuto(Public really criticized the media for that)'

Participant 22: '#BizInsight- for our weekly business news program.#ProjectGalana-for a documentary I did on Galana irrigation scheme. #KDFourHeroes-for celebration of KDF hashtags really trended and got the national attention intended. The Galana scheme was a government project. The hashtags worked.'

Participant 4: 'I haven't really formulated hashtags but I use them. #WengerOut is one of them'

Participant 6: '#FreeJoyDoreen was useful in ensuring business journalist Joy Doreen was from jail in Uganda.'

Participant 8: '*#RioFiasco. This happened in 2016 when Kenyans athletes were deprived of allowances and uniforms as they represented the country in the Rio, Brazil Olympics.*'

The Rio scandal was about Kenyan athletes being denied proper accommodation and even outfits as organizers used their money to travel with relatives and friends to Rio Olympics. Kenyans demanded answers to the fiasco.

The media respondents were also asked what they use the hashtags for. Out of the 22 journalists interviewed 21 said they use them for gathering public opinion, interacting with audience and news dissemination. 18 of the journalists said they use them for polling on current issues and for getting feedback on news. All the journalists interviewed said the most frequently used social media network used as a news source by Kenyans was Twitter. This is an indicator of a paradigm shift where the hashtag is used as a news source through Twitter. The media has been featuring hashtags created by the public and anchoring the news piece on them. A good example would #147IsNotJustANumber. This finding is in agreement with scholars who looked at Twitter as news source such as Harlow and Johnson (2011); Kowalchuk (2009); Smith, McCarthy, McPhail, and Augusty (2001). The study by Harlow and Johnson (2011) found that Twitter feeds and blogs provided more legitimacy to protestors and more opportunities for interactivity and understanding in the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Twitter can alter both quality and quantity of mainstream press coverage and sway public opinion.

The researcher sought to find out if there was a paradigm shift in news production and dissemination with the emergence of hashtags. Traditionally, the media produces news and disseminates them to the public. The respondents were asked two questions in this regard. The first one was on why there is a new trend in Kenya where journalists are using hashtags in every programme especially news. They explained the new trend thus:

Participant 10: *The formulation of the hashtags is a reaction to what social media is becoming. We need to become part of the social media conversation.*

Participant 12: *This has been informed by the fact that there is need to uniquely identify the show. Hashtags are preferred.*

Participant 3: *It is easier to keep tabs on who is contributing to your shows when you use hashtags.*

Participant 6: *I think the fact that hashtags make words stand out in the platforms; they simply caught up with time.*

The respondents were also asked if the hashtags have affected media houses in their operations especially taking into consideration the general role of the media is to create news and disseminate to the public as well as being the public watchdog.

Participant 1: *Yes. The effects are more positive than negative. Most media houses have increased their audience due to the use of hashtags. The good outweighs the bad. Hashtags help broadcast news faster.*

Participant 14: *Since hashtags are popularized by the public, their use by media houses goes a long way in reaching out and connecting with the audience. Some of the can negative opinion shapers though, making the public view some media houses in some kind of biased way.*

The researcher also interviewed independent hashtag developers, who were asked to indicate the purpose for which Kenyans are using hashtags. The following are some of the responses:

Participant 1: *'To come together virtually. To share opinions and be heard. -If you are concerned with the economy, you simply go to the twitter and start discussion using hashtag #EconomyKenya and people with similar interests are likely to join and start sharing and as more tweets are shared so does the topic become popular and start trending.'*

Participant 3: *'They were invented for penetration. For instance, a photo on Instagram with# reaches more people. Hashtags are trendy (in touch with the world). Social activism e.g. #TakeKenyaBack (by KOT)'*

The hashtag developers were also asked to indicate some of the hash tags they have formulated as an individual or organization. The following are some of the responses:

Participant 1: *'As a marketing organization, we represent a diverse set of clientele on the social media space and as such we have come up with several hashtags campaigns over the years. Most recently #MamasSpecial during mothers' day where one of our clients encouraged users to share 'Why they love their mamas'. One of the most popular one was for Safaricom and was dubbed #RiseForKenya – this was around celebrating Kenyans athletes who were going to represent Kenya at the Rio Olympics. It was so successful such that we had the president, first lady and a couple of other government officials share tweets using the hashtag.'*

Participant 2: *'#ThePlotKe (get people aware of the event), #ItsBig (referring to Pambazuka National Lottery), #LipaDeni (Gloss: pay your debt) was from a credit bureau and was meant to encourage people to pay loans and associate loans with credit score. All of them were successful.'*

The media respondents were then asked if there is a paradigm shift in news dissemination from the effects of the hashtag revolution. 18 out of the 22 of them agreed that there is a general shift towards digitizing media and involving the public more in news production and consumption. Some of the responses given include:

Participant 21: *Yes. The media are increasingly relying on social media for trending news. The media has been able to get feedback and read the views of public on air. The public also corrects where there are unconfirmed reports. There is also positive messaging thus encouraging the media practitioners. Sometimes the public goes online with the hashtag before the normal times for bulletins thus beating the media. The hashtags are not detailed and cannot give the whole story. The concern is that*

*there is no confirmation on social media but media houses must have verified information.*

Participant 19: *Yes there is definitely a paradigm shift. The use of hashtags helps media houses filter feedback from users. On the negative side, some hashtags are defamatory while others are full of criticism.*

Participant 6: *There is paradigm shift. The hashtags have helped add weight and emphasis on matters of national interest.*

Participant 4: *Yes, Very much. It has made information easily accessible and audience feedback is instant.*

The production of news has traditionally been done by the media. From the findings, the ordinary citizen seems to be a producer, distributor and consumer of the news in the form of hashtags. The respondents agree there is a paradigm shift through use of hashtags in Twitter discourse. For one, Twitter allows real time breaking of news. The public may get news online before the news appears on radio or television. One journalist explained this shift this way:

Participant 12: *Social media is powerful and it has affected the way we produce and disseminate news. Sometimes the people in social are way ahead of us even in breaking news. We have had to read about tragedies and disasters in social media first. However our practice requires us to verify news and this may take time. So, yes things are changing but the public still relies on traditional media for authentication of news.*

The other indicator of a paradigm shift is about who is framing the hashtags. In this case the media framing theory is being tested a new. The evolving practice of citizen journalism in Kenya is changing the landscape. In this research the number of hashtags produced by the ordinary citizen (Wanjiku) was well over 80%, meaning that the media practitioners, commercial developers and bloggers had a small contribution of less than 20%. This being the case, the role of media in setting the

agenda, framing and priming of news needs to be further researched where computer mediated discourse and social media use is concerned. When citizens formulate hashtags they are the ones who frame the news. When the hashtag is posted on Twitter they decide how soon and for how long the issue is discussed. The media respondents said that they have been forced to go online to keep up with the audience. Going online, especially in sites such as Facebook and Twitter, helps them to get feedback as respondent 2 above explains.

The theory of citizen journalism describes three types of citizen media outlets. The community cooperatives led by voluntary labour with little to no professional experience, blog aggregator sites that allow citizens to scan multiple blogs and the legacy media sites that are set up by mainstream media but allow citizens to dominate content (an example is UReport by the Standard Media Group) (Schaffer, 2007). The findings of this research contrast with this description of citizen journalism as practice. The KOT create their own hashtags that are able to gain national and global attention and sometimes become news items in the traditional media outlets. Instead of the media allowing citizens to dominate content in platforms that they create for them, we now have media houses training digital journalists to keep in touch with online audiences and having specific programmes that feature trending hashtags. In this case, the media are collaborating and at the same time competing with their audiences. Examples are The Trend on NTV and the segment on “What is Trending?” aired on Citizen TV. The media houses also create hashtags for most programmes. Celebrity bloggers have also been able to create hashtags that citizens respond to. Therefore, citizen journalism in Kenya takes a whole new definition. SM have pushed journalism towards the audience. This is a paradigm shift in news gathering, framing (packaging) and dissemination. These findings concur with those of Jensen (2012) and Bruns (2008b) that as the media plays its usual role of gate-keeping, the public now plays the role of gate-watching. The process of gate-watching allows the citizens to watch, comment and edit every stage of the communication process. Participatory communication principles include dialogue, voice, liberating pedagogy and action-reflection-action. Dialogue allows

conversation between men that allows problem recognition in social, economic and legal issues. Hashtags seem to play this role by allowing online debates on issues that matter to Kenyans including injustices. Kenyans are raising their voices online through hashtags. Thus it is a form of liberating pedagogy that gives hope to the suppressed and voiceless Kenyans who may not be adequately addressed in mainstream media. Sometimes these discussions lead to actions upon various opinions being exchanged and reflected upon online. This is a form of independent citizen journalism.

The respondents, both in the media and ordinary citizens, were also asked whether it matters who formulates a hashtag in relation to its popularity. 18 media practitioners, 10 KOT and the two hashtag developers were of the opinion that it matters. The following were some their responses:

Participant 1: *Yes it matters. If it is from a prominent person then it will trend.*

Participant 6: *Yes. Hashtags generated by important persons and celebrities tend to trend as compared to common mwananchi generated hashtags.*

Participant 3: *Yes. The person must be a popular social media figure for the hashtag to trend.*

Participant 4: *Partly. If you are popular, then it takes a shorter time to get people to participate in your cause. Otherwise, if it is matters close the hearts of many Kenyans, then it does not matter who starts it. For example, the hashtags #WestgateAttack and RIP Saitoti created by ordinary Kenyans. In this case the first person to share it creates breaking news and from there communication goes viral. If the campaign is leaning towards commercial motives, then you need someone or a team with considerable influence to drive your message.*

One of the observations made in the research was the tendency of tweeps to name drop. Celebrities and prominent bloggers are tagged in the conversation even if they were not tweeting. The participants seem to believe the views of respondents above

about important persons and celebrities making a hashtag trend more. Addressivity is part of the hashtag code. Every tweet is directed at someone. This lingo is different from normal grammar where a name may be mentioned once in a flowing exchange. The following tweets attest to that:

**Being Charlie @BeingCharlie** May 16 Nairobi, Kenya

Being Charlie Retweeted Fox News

**#BungomaJamesBond** making international headlines Cc @lindahoguttu @jageyo @jamessmat @Donsarigo

1 retweet 1 like

**Raymond Matata(MBS) @raymondmtetezi** May 19

**#GainWithXtianDela** follow now @raymondmtetezi to see where jumas torch is  
**#RIPJacobJuma**

**Mkenyalligentsia @kenyalligentsia** Mar 3

Mkenyalligentsia Retweeted Uhuru Kenyatta

You cant make this stuff up!! Welcoming ceremony et al.. **#UhuruInKenya** cc  
**@WanjikuRevolt** **@WanjeriNderu** **@C\_NyaKundiH**

Mkenyalligentsia added,

**Uhuru Kenyatta @UKenyatta**

Arriving back into the country from the 17th EAC Summit in Arusha.

3 retweets 0 likes

In these examples, the names of celebrity bloggers like Cyprian Nyakundi and Christian Ndela and media personalities like Linda Ongutu and Joe Ageo seem to affirm the above claims that every tweet is directed at someone. The tweeps are using them in reply to other tweeps. The finding here is that tagging of other users is also meant to include them in the conversation. This is in agreement with the study by Zappavigna (2017) who sees hashtags as a form of microblogging and states that microbloggers tend to embed metadata in posts. The conversational tagging helps people to easily find out what is going on in real time.

The Kenyans on twitter were asked to respond to the question on how often they respond to hashtags. 87% of media respondents, 90% of KOT and the 4 commercial developers (100%) indicated that they respond to hash tags often. The following were the responses:

Participant 2: ‘Yes, e.g. #TalktoDpRuto (during a program where he was hosted).#StateoftheNation. #HurumaTragedy. #ManderaAttack.’

Participant 3: ‘Almost daily. Every day there is a new topic to talk about or a new story that requires interaction via a hashtag.’

Participant 4: *Often .whenever there is need, mostly on an issue of national interest that needs to be projected.*

Participant 5: ‘Quite often, especially when breaking news items.’

Participant 8: ‘On a daily basis’

Participant 9: *A lot. Kenyans are active online. We young people do not like being left behind. If you do not follow things you lose touch. I do it like daily.*

The media respondents were further asked to indicate whether their media house used any hashtag generated by the public for news or other programmes. Majority of the respondents indicated that their media house used some hashtag generated by the public for news or other programmes. The following are some of the responses.

Participant 1: ‘No. As a media house, the policy is to only use hashtags generated by ourselves, it helps us to be more credible as the National Broadcaster.’

Participant 2: ‘Yes. #DoctorsStrike’

Participant 4: *Yes. DoctorsStrike. The strike had been ongoing for a long time and it is always a developing story so the hashtag was very relevant because most people were using it.*

Participant 5: *Not always. Sometimes media houses adopt other hashtags from the public such as #LipaKamaTender.*

*Participant 6: Yes. When media houses used to verify certain breaking news, they may adopt hashtags from the public.*

*Participant 7: Rarely. Citizen TV prides itself in formulating hashtags. Sometimes, when the hashtag is of national importance we can consider.*

21 of the 22 media practitioners were of the view that the media should keep its role of being the primary source of information and therefore should not keep adopting hashtags from the public without verification of information. However the independent hashtag developers said that the media do pick hashtags adopted by other players. The developers were asked if there were instances where other players like the media or government agencies respond to hashtags formulated by the independent bloggers or ordinary citizens. The responses were as follows.

*Participant 1: They certainly do. Look at the example of #SomeoneTellCNN. CNN had wrongly titled an article and it led to public backlash of the network on Twitter. They had to apologize and change the title. Back home (Kenya) we have seen the civil society, ordinary citizens (KOT), bloggers, politicians raise concerns using hashtags and the government duly responds. So, yes they do pay attention. They may not always react but they will take notice.*

*Participant 2: They do. In fact they even use some hashtags during news. An example is #147IsNotJustANumber was used by all media houses. Every day there is a segment on the day's trends and these hashtags are featured during news. In doing this, public debate is brought to mainstream media. Actions like arrests, prosecution and government mentions are good examples. The president has in the past mentioned hashtags that are highly popular and sensational e.g. #MyDressMyChoice and #HotBedOfTerror. The intervention of the president led to prosecution of the offenders in the first case (undressing a scantily dressed girl in a street in Nairobi). In the second case the hashtag almost escalated to a diplomatic scuffle, so CNN had to apologize.*

The independent hashtag developers were asked to indicate whether there are instances where organizations or individuals develop hashtags on contract for instance by politicians, business operators and media practitioners without relying on current happenings. All of the respondents indicated yes. The following are some of the responses.

Participant 4: '*Yes especially for business or political mileage during campaigns.*'

Participant 2: '*Yes. E.g. #LipaDeni –no major event. #ItsBig developed for independent companies to meet different goals*'

Besides the journalists, the researcher also sought to get information from the ordinary Twitter users (KOT) on whether they produce hashtags and the way they respond to them. This group represents Wanjiku. Traditionally these would be the recipients of media messages but in the hashtag formulation, they are seen as both formulators and consumers. The respondents (KOT) were asked to indicate whether they have ever formulated a hash tag on social media. 80% of the 10 respondents indicated they have formulated a hash tag on social media. The following are some of the responses.

Participant 1: '*No, No*'

Participant 2: '*Yes. JkuatJournalist*'

Participant 3: '*Yes. #ObamaWelcomeToKenyaWhere*'

Participant 4: '*Yes. #JKUATMMFRelaunch, #JKUATMDF2017*'

Participant 5: '*Yes. #RerouteSGR*'

The respondents were further asked to indicate what hashtags trend more nationally between those generated by the public or those generated by the media. The respondent that is the media and the commercial hashtag developers indicated that hash tags from the public trend most. The following were the responses.

Participant 1: *The public. The media don't create hashtags except during news. E.g. #BeyondZerononsense, #Boycottbeyondzero (Talk to your husband about health crisis)*

Participant 2: *The public. The media does not tell people to use hashtags*

Media practitioners were also asked which groups of people respond to hashtags that they or other producers formulate. Their responses included:

Participant 1: *Youths, business people and politicians*

Participant 3: *Citizens, social activists and NGO'S*

Participant 4: *The general public e.g. ordinary citizens would react if the issue is controversial or on social justice. The elite and the high class just read the comments. Bottom line the topic guides reactions.*

In hashtag discourse the source of the message sometimes is also the receiver. This study therefore uses actors to refer to the participants in the tweets. The actors included the media, the KOT who may include ordinary citizens, professional bloggers and celebrities. Twitter seems to attract people from all social classes in Kenya. The use of Kiswahili in the tweets and sometimes incoherent sentences is an indication that the tweeps may not be left out of public debate through hashtags due to factors like class, gender, level of education or religion. In the following tweets, some participants seem to struggle with basic sentence structure indicating a low level of education. Another is raising the issue of employment indicating the plight of the lower class. This is an indicator of another paradigm shift since in most parts of the world, Twitter is for the elite who use it as a news source while the less educated tend to use other platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp (Zappavigna 2012).

**robert kamau @bobgkamau 13 Nov 2015**

As KOT do what they do best, fight anything n everything  
**#KenyansVsZimbabweans**

**Morris Jambaya Snr @ApostleJambaya** 13 Nov 2015

The beef is not between Kenyans and Zimbabweans, but Kenyans on Zimbabweans  
**#KenyansVsZimbabweans**. The article was damn fake

**★Abi@'s 1§T SoNTM ★@ObkTouchdown** 12 Nov 2015

Before twas **#KenyansvsNigerians** now its both **#SouthAfricansvsKenyans**  
**#KenyansvsZimbabweans**. Pls lets talk about kenyans level of unemployment

**HRH Duchess Bella @hrhduchessissy** 11 Nov 2015

Drought in Africa make some noise clap the earth to make the water raise up  
**@ AfricanUnion @zamu\_pf #KenyansVsZimbabweans** maheu zimbo

The creators of the hashtags therefore are not necessarily the elite but ordinary Kenyans who want their voices heard. The tagging of popular bloggers politicians and media practitioners to popularize a hashtag means that the tweeps are aware of the general communication principle on source credibility and its role in message effectiveness. These findings are in contrast with those of Kang (2010) who says that source credibility in interpersonal communication can be analyzed by looking at characteristics like expertise, reliability, intellectual worth and professionalism. In this study, the findings were that the participants of the study indicated that the source of the blogs was critical in their decision to read the blog or not. However, in the Kenyan scenario most hashtag developers are not known. The hashtags that are most influential are formulated by Wanjiku whose real identity is not always indicated as people use fake virtual identifiers. The hashtag **#BabaWhileYouWereAway** was very influential in Kenya's political landscape and is still active years down the line. It was by an unknown Kenyan who remains anonymous to date. The findings of this research agree with those of Kim (2015) who says that in his study source credibility did not play a critical role on participants' online news evaluation but the comments of others did influence participation.

These findings from the tweets data and the interviews were analyzed statistically as shown below. Results can either be significant or insignificant. Statistically

significant is the likelihood that a relationship between two or more variables is caused by something other than random chance. The study used p-values and t-values to explain the significance of the results. Results are said to be significant if the P-value is less than 0.05 (Bland & Altman, 1995). The F critical value is 4.087, when the calculated F value is greater than the critical t- value then the results are said to be significant

The results in table 4.6 indicates that hash tags actors had a significant influence on formation of public opinion ( $F$ -statistics=5.807,  $P$ -value = 0.005). This is because the  $F$  statistics value ( $F$  statistic =5.807) was less than the critical  $F$  value ( $F$  statistic =4.087). This was also supported by the probability value ( $P$ -value = 0.005) which was less than the critical  $p$  value ( $p$  –value =0.05). This means that the actors of hash tags have an impact on formation of public opinion on socio political issues.

**Table 4.10: ANOVA between public, bloggers, media personality and Public Opinion**

	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Between Groups	0.55	3	0.275	5.807	0.005
Within Groups	10.897	32	0.341		
<b>Total</b>	<b>11.447</b>	<b>35</b>			

#### **4.5.2.1 Hypothesis Testing for Hash Tags Actors**

The hypothesis was tested by using t - test. The acceptance/rejection criteria was that, if the  $p$  value is greater than 0.05, the  $H_0$  is not rejected but if it's less than 0.05, the  $H_1$  fails to be accepted. The null hypothesis was that there is no significant relationship between Hash tag actors and formation of public opinion. Results in Table 4.10 above show that the  $p$ -value was  $0.000<0.05$ . This indicated that the null hypothesis was rejected hence there is a significant relationship hashtag actors and formation of public opinion.

### **4.5.3 Hashtag Context on Public Opinion Formation**

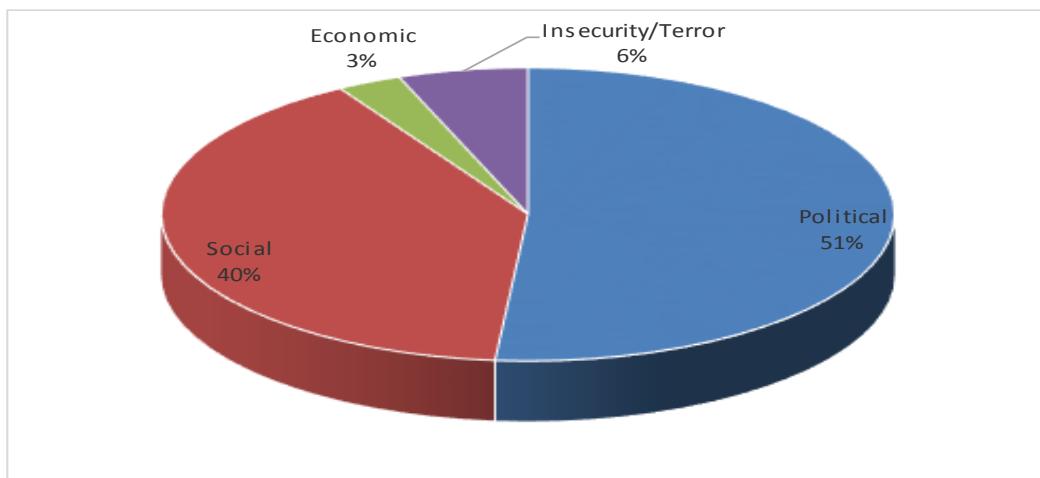
The third objective of the study was to determine the influence of the hashtag context on public opinion formation on sociopolitical issues in Kenya. Hashtags by their very nature are contextual in that using a hashtag contextualizes and filters information so that what is relevant during that period of time is discussed. Context is explained in two levels, the situational context and the co-text. To understand these levels the researcher addresses the field (type of social activity involved), the tenor (the interpersonal aspect drawing on relationship between players) and the mode (the text status in terms of its function in the social situation). In the study the field refers to social and political happenings around which hashtags are formed, referred to in critical discourse analysis as social practice. The tenor refers to the actors in the formation and consumption of the hashtag (media, Wanjiku and commercial developers). The mode (text) in this study refers to the hashtag itself. The tenor and the field can be described under the situational context. The mode is discussed under the co-text.

#### **4.5.3.1 Situational context**

This level of context in this study refers to the social and political situation that direct the formulation of the hashtags. It is the field in discourse terms. The question that the researcher was trying to address here is; what was happening when the hashtag was produced? Who was doing it, where and when? Halliday (1978) describes situational context as having three characteristics that can be used to describe it. The social action which refers to what is going on and has a recognizable meaning in the social system (for instance a terror attack); the role structure which comprises participant relationships specific to the situation ( such as the people exchanging tweets on Twitter); and the symbolic organization which includes the text itself, the function of the text in the situation and the channel of communication ( for instance a hashtag that is formulated to create awareness or inject activist thoughts through social media). Thus situational context refers to the what, the who and the how of the hashtag discourse in this study. In this study, every hashtag was formulated during a

specific issue regime. The issue could be a political crisis such a scandal in a ministry, a terror attack, collapsed buildings, social disorder and so on.

To establish the context of the hashtags the research used content analysis. All the 35 hashtags were listed and then categorized according to the issue regime. In this regard, situational context basically addressed the questions: what is the hashtag about? When was it formulated? What was happening? From this analysis of the 35 hashtags, 14 were on social issues, 18 were political, 1 was economic and 2 were on insecurity. These findings are presented in percentages in the figure below. The results in figure 4.6 revealed that most of the hash tags which were 51% were from political context, 40% of the hash tags were from social context, 6% of the hash tags were from insecurity/terror while only 3% of the hash tags were from economic context. These figures are based on the hashtags mentioned by the respondents as well as those selected for the study by the researcher.



**Figure 4.5: Situational Context**

The issue regime and the category of the issue as analyzed in this research are shown in appendix 3, a table showing the situational context of each of the 35 hashtags.

The researcher also used interviews to compliment the findings from content analysis. The public hash tag developers were asked to respond to the question on why there is a new trend in Kenya, where Kenyans are using social media to discuss

issues that concern them, especially with the use of hashtags. The following were some of the responses:

Participant 1: '*Hashtags allow users to form a discussion around a topic of interest. They became popular because now people can virtually meet other people with whom they share similar interest from all corners of the world or Kenya. For instance, brands are able to know what people say or think about their brands and other marketing and communication activities.*'

Participant 2: '*People spending more time on devices other than TV. Access is good. Can do it anywhere, Penetration is broader even global which is different from radio. Easy to rally support on social media. One on one conversation allows for sharing thoughts, reply in the tweet and open to strangers.*'

From these two responses we infer that people do not just tweet. They respond to issues and situations on social media. They are also meeting other needs including social connections and marketing. This is in agreement with what Halliday (1978) calls social action and symbolic organization. Every issue is discussed by people in an organized manner through a known medium. The respondents claimed that it is easy to access social media and gain social support in the process.

The respondents were also asked to state the kind of situations that lead to hashtag formation. The aim was to find out the social context of hashtag formation. Some of their responses are outlined below.

Participant 21: *Breaking news; issues of national interest; interesting news or topic; exclusive stories or interviews.*

Participant 19: *Hashtags are formulated when news items break and there is need to gather feedback from viewers e.g. during a tragedy. Also during surveys when public responses are inevitable.*

Participant 3: *Trending topics and news of national importance.*

*Participant 7: Creating awareness, popularizing a programme and addressing topical issues.*

*Participant 5: Breaking news such as terror attacks, elections. Strikes and global hit stories e.g. Trump's victory.*

The public hash tag developers were asked to indicate what social or political issues inform the formulation of the hashtags. The following were the responses

*Participant 1: 'Hashtags are a representation of what is happening today socio-politically, economically or a mix of all. So yes, they all inform formulation of hashtags.'*

*Participant 2: 'A tragedy such as #NaivashaTragedy, Scandals e.g. NYS, Worlds events, Politics e.g. #ObamaVisitsKenya, Social issues such as #KNHCancerMachines, Fundraising #JadudiFundraiser, Sexual harassment e.g. #MigunaMigunaVSPassaris, MydressmyChoice'*

The journalists were asked to indicate the factors they consider when coming up with a hashtag. The following were the responses:

*Participant 1: 'Has to be simple, very few characters. Current. Capture the message.'*

*Participant 8: 'Must be short (to fit on screen). Must be original (not from another media house). No vulgar language. Choice of language /code depends on program. Informative. Emotional appeal'*

*Participant 17: 'The topic of discussion. Media house policy. Objectivity. Journalists code of conduct.'*

*Participant 10: 'Length of hashtag. Appeal to audience.'*

*Participant 6: 'The topic of discussion, the length of the hashtag'*

*Participant 9: 'Yes. The wording. The said hashtag needs to be clear and concise as well as having the correct use of words'*

*Participant 13: 'Yes. Relevance, timing, importance, prominence, oddity, proximity'*

The respondents were further asked to indicate the situations that lead to formation of a hashtag. The following were the responses:

Participant 1: '*Breaking news. Live coverage of events. Different programs have different hashtags. News. Interviews with prominent people.*'

Participant 6: *Breaking news. National Interest. Interesting news/topics. Seeking feedback from public. Exclusive stories/Interviews.*

Participant 3: '*When there are issues of national interest to be highlighted. The attention viewers are potentially going to give an issue.*'

Participant 4: '*When news item break. Where there is need for feedback from the public viewers/readers on websites. During surveys where public responses are inevitable'*

To compliment these answers, the researcher listed the 35 hashtags and repeated them to the respondents so that they could classify them in terms of political, social or other issues and in this sense indicate the hash tag context. The respondents were supposed to give scores of between 1 and 10 to the hashtag context based on what they think the hashtag is about. If they strongly felt that a hashtag was political for example then they would give a score of 10. The mean score of hash tag with political context after all the respondents were interviewed was 5.407. The standard deviation was 0.638 and this implies that the scores of hash tags with political context of respondent were not varied. The minimum score given to hashtag in political context was 4.5 minimum while the maximum score given to hashtag in political context was 6.67 respectively. The results also showed that the mean score of hash tags in social context was 5.321 with a standard deviation of 0.505. The minimum score given to hashtag in social context was 5.5 minimum while the maximum score give to hash tag in social context was 6.67 respectively. The results also showed that the mean score of the hashtags in economic context was 4.33 with no standard deviation. The minimum score given to hash tag in economic context was 4.33 and maximum minimum score given to hashtag in economic context was 4.33 respectively. The results also showed that the mean score of hashtags in insecurity/terror context was 5.165 with a standard deviation of 0.233. The minimum

score given to hashtag in insecurity/terror was 5 and minimum score given to hashtag in insecurity/terror context was 5.33 respectively.

**Table 4.11: Descriptive Statistics for Hashtag Context**

	Mea	Std.	95% Confidence Interval		Minim	Maxim
	n	Deviation	for Mean		um	um
			Lower Bound		Upper Bound	
<b>Political</b>	5.407	0.638	5.0901	5.7243	4.5	6.67
<b>Social</b>	5.321	0.505	5.0298	5.6131	4.5	6.67
<b>Economic</b>	4.33	.	.	.	4.33	4.33
<b>Insecurity/ Terror</b>	5.165	0.233	3.0685	7.2615	5	5.33
<b>Total</b>	5.328	0.580	5.129	5.5276	4.33	6.67

Results can either be significant or insignificant. Statistically significant is the likelihood that a relationship between two or more variables is caused by something other than random chance. The study used p-values to explain the significance of the results.

The results in table 4.8 indicated that hash tags context had a significant influence on public opinion (P-value = 0.038). This is because the probability value (P-value = 0.038) was less than the critical p value (p –value =0.05). This implies that the hashtag context has an impact on the formation of public opinion on social political issues.

**Table 4.12: ANOVA for Hashtag Context and Public Opinion**

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.163	3	0.388	5.168	0.038
Within Groups	10.284	31	0.332		
Total	11.447	34			

#### **4.5.3.2 Co-Text**

Context is also analyzed by investigating the linguistic characteristics of a message which is referred to as the co-text. The researcher investigated the 35 hashtags in terms of their linguistic features and function in the social context they were used. The hashtags were categorized in terms of issues addressed in reference to the basic meaning of the words. All the 35 hashtags used words that drew on basic meanings rather than connotative or social meanings. The hashtags seemed to address specific issues at any one time. The wording was clear and concise and timely in the sense that the happenings of the day were addressed in the fewest words possible. The hashtag #RapeDoctor, for instance, addressed news that were in mainstream media about an unqualified doctor who drugged and defiled patients. The use of the word rape captured the anger of the people and the magnitude of the issue. A hashtag like #DepotRutoPilot clearly shows the stand of the formulator. That discussion on compromise is not an option and the pilot needs to be viewed as racist and disrespectful to the locals (Kenyans). #MyDressMyChoice sends a clear message that violence towards women under the guise of decency will not be tolerated as they have rights. #PastorOfImpunity sends a strong message on the need for law to take its course on a pastor who kills an ordinary Kenyan and is still free. The word impunity is strong enough to warrant officers to act. #SomeoneTellCNN, #SomeOneTellKagame and #SomeoneTellNigeria were hashtags that trended globally and have come to be identified with Kenyans on Twitter. In fact, they have formed the strongest level of patriotism whenever Kenyans have been attacked by outsiders. The wording leaves one sure that whatever it is they did has hit Kenyans the wrong way.

The hashtags analyzed by the researcher reflect this feature of wording that is directly addressing the social situation at play. The function of the hashtag is clear and there is a deliberate attempt to avoid ambiguity. For instance, some are informative, like #ObamaInKenya, #BroOchollaMoment, #ParisAttack, #HurumaTragedy. Others are meant to push for action, like #SomeoneTellCNN,

#StopTheDrunkPresident, #IStandWithKDF, #147IsNotJustANumber. Others are meant to mock, create humor or give a neutralized criticism of an issue, for example, #JehovahWanyonyi, #BabaWhileYouWereAway, #BungomaJamesBond, #UhuruVisitsKenya.

#### **4.5.3.3 Hypothesis Testing for Hash Tags Context**

The hypothesis was tested by using t - test. The acceptance/rejection criteria was that, if the p value is greater than 0.05, the  $H_0$  is not rejected but if it's less than 0.05, the  $H_0$  fails to be accepted.

The null hypothesis was that there is no significant relationship between Hash tag context and formation of public opinion. Results in Table 4.11 above show that the p-value was  $0.000 < 0.05$ . This indicated that the null hypothesis was rejected hence there is a significant relationship between nature of Hash tag context and formation of public opinion.

#### **4.5.4 Nature of the Hashtag Discourse on the Formation of Public Opinion**

The fourth objective was to investigate the influence of the nature of the hashtag discourse on the formation of public opinion in socio-political issues in Kenya. The concept of discourse in this study is the exchange between participants on Twitter (tweeps). Discourse as part of social life involves the exchange of messages in the form of texts. When members of the public interact they do so with the full knowledge of the social systems that guide their communication. In the analysis of the nature of discourse, the focus of the study was on the number of mentions each hashtags generated, the flow of discourse in terms of the interaction of participants which includes turn taking, interactivity and disruptions as well as the duration of exposure or volatility of the particular hashtag. This section addresses each of these aspects individually. Content analysis and critical discourse analysis are used to analyze the nature of discourse under the 35 hashtags. The initiation of the discourse is when a hashtag is created and posted on Twitter by the developer.

#### **4.5.4.1 Number of Mentions**

To find out the nature of hashtag discourse, the researcher analyzed the hashtags in relation to the number of mentions each hashtag was able to acquire during the period in which it was trending. It is important to state that hashtags continue to get tweets, retweets and mentions long after they have fizzled from the public debate as is the case with the hashtag #BabaWhileYouWereAway which was formulated in 2014 and is still getting tweets posted. Mentions are messages in which a particular twitter hashtag user is mentioned using the @ sign. These messages are then posted on the respondent's public page. The mentions are closely related to tweets because almost every tweet has an addressee. The tweets and retweets from followers indicate how popular the hashtag is. Twitter is heavily dependent on retweets which is the means by which information is propagated and popularized. If a hashtag is formed but not tweeted and retweeted then it naturally fizzles out. Millions of hashtags are formulated every day but not many are on the trend list. The sampled hashtags had thousands of mentions. Public opinion cannot be formed by a hashtag that appears briefly on Twitter, It requires a lot of tweeting for it to gain popularity, appear in mainstream media as a news item and have target audience reconsidering alternative thoughts on issues. One needs to have a lot of followers to get mentions, tweets and retweets. The tweets below show how conversations take place on Twitter where mentions, appearing after the @ sign and tweets and retweets are portrayed.

Aug 2

After **#hurumatragedy** evictions were stopped because someone believed he was evicting his own voters. now **#Kariobangi**

**Allan thathi @allanthathi** Aug 2

**@KideroEvans** 200+ buildings ear marked 4 demolitions in Nairobi after the **#hurumatragedy** what happened? Why is **#Kariobangi** still happening?

**Dj Double Trouble @DjDaboTrabo** Aug 2

@KideroEvans @county\_nairobi promised to clear the mess after the #HurumaTragedy now #Kariobangi. They never care .

**Nduta M @Nduts09** Jun 29

#NairobiCountyAchievements #LestWeForget #HurumaTragedy Over 150 affected after building collapses in Huruma

**Duncan Ogweno @RasDunkie13** Jun 20

what became of the #HurumaTragedy story... how many died? what became of the owner of the building? did the demolitions go on?

**JayJayWaziri @jjwaziri** Jun 13

#HurumaTragedy, Kenyans across all tribes helped each other. fast forward last Monday, huruma stoned, burned n looted #RailaTheWardogSince82

**Rein @Asamoh** Jun 11

Patients admitted at KNH after #HurumaTragedy detained for non-payment of charges. Shs 1.8B looted from NYS @disembe @IkeOjuok #BudgetKE2016

**CrimeAlert4Kenyans @CrimeAkoriginal** Jun 7

#HurumaTragedy building owners, 4 others charged with manslaughter, other charges, for causing death of 52 people.

**Mac Otani Verified account @MacOtani** Jun 7

#HurumaTragedy building owners, 4 others charged with manslaughter, other charges, for causing death of 52 people.

**gathara @gathara** Aug 2

Remember how families were evicted from their "unsafe" homes following #HurumaCollapse? Were new, higher paying, tenants allowed to move in?

Jul 24 #BuruBurusFall and #HurumaCollapse are consequences of turning our real estate market into a laundry for dirty cash.

**The Inspector +254** @254inspector May 24

@makodingo cases of the rich r probed, then thrown out. sisi wengine, we r charged even before police are sure. @ODPP\_KE #**HurumaCollapse**

**ODPP\_KE** @ODPP\_KE May 24

Police granted more time to probe collapsed Huruma building owners  
#Manslaughter\_ODPP #**HurumaCollapse** DKW

To establish the number of mentions for each hashtag, the researcher relied on Twitter database that always indicates the number of mentions under each hashtags through the page TwitterTrends.com. Using content analysis, the 35 hashtags were listed and categorized in terms of the number of hashtags as shown in appendix 2. Only hashtags with over 10,000 mentions were included in the research. The above tweets under the hashtag #HurumaTragedy show how the mentions and retweets appear in Twitter.

The number of mentions in the 35 hashtags sampled was widely varied ranging from 10,000 to 154,000. All the hashtags were able to feature in national television news. This shows that the number of mentions does not necessarily direct the public opinion formed about an issue of national importance though a hashtag must be tweeted and retweeted to gain popularity as opposed to no response to the tweet at all. The findings agree with those of Suh et al (2010) who says that there is a strong linear relationship between the number of followers and the retweet rate. The more followers one has the more likely the tweet will be retweeted. In Kenya the hashtag formulators as previously shown are mostly ordinary citizens who may not have a lot of followers. The ability of these people to popularize a tweet is low. Therefore in most cases mentioning a popular blogger, business tycoons or media personalities ensures that the hashtag becomes popular.

The mentions were analyzed statistically to show the influence of mentions on public opinion formation. The mean score of nature of hash tag discourse was 11802.9 with a standard deviation of 29794.18. The minimum number of mentions of the hashtags

was 10,000 while the maximum number of mentions of hashtags was 154,000 respectively.

**Table 4.13: Nature of Hashtag discourse**

	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Number of mentions	10000	154000	118702.9	29794.18

The results presented in table 4.10 present the fitness of model used in the regression model to explain the study phenomena. Number of mentions does not provide a good fit in predicting changes in public opinion. This is supported by coefficient of determination also known as the R square of 10.24%. This means that number of mentions explain 10.24% of the variations in the dependent variable which is public opinion. These results further mean that the model applied to link the relationship of the variables does not provide a relatively good fit.

**Table 4.14: Model Fitness for Number of Mentions**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>
R	0.322
R Square	0.1024
Adjusted R Squared	0.1020
Std. Error of the Estimate	0.57910

Table 4.13 provides the results on the analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results indicate that the overall model did not provide a relatively good fit. Further, the results imply that the number of mentions is not a good predictor of public opinion formation. This was supported by an F statistic of 1.134 and the reported P-value (0.000) which was more than the conventional probability of 0.05 significance level.

**Table 4.15: ANOVA for Number of Mentions in a Hashtag**

	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig</b>
<b>Regression</b>	0.38	1	0.38	0.38	1.134	0.295
<b>Residual</b>	11.067	33	0.335			
<b>Total</b>	11.447	34				

Results can either be significant or insignificant. Statistically significant is the likelihood that a relationship between two or more variables is caused by something other than random chance. The study used p-values and t values to explain the significance of the results. Regression of coefficients results in Table 4.11 shows that number of mentions and public opinion are negatively and insignificant related ( $p=0.295$ ). This was supported by the probability value ( $P\text{-value} = 0.295$ ) which was more than the critical p value ( $p\text{-value} = 0.05$ ). This implies that number of mentions of a hash tag does not have an impact on formation of public opinion.

**Table 4.16: Regression of Coefficients**

	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
				<b>(P-value)</b>
<b>Constant</b>	5.75	0.408	14.106	0
<b>No. of Mentions</b>	-3.55E-06	0	-1.065	<b>0.295</b>

#### 4.5.4.2 Flow of Hashtag Discourse

The flow of discourse in relation to Twitter hashtags is crucial in understanding the negotiation of meaning which leads to opinion formation. The exchange of information in computer mediated discourse has its own characteristics. In CMD texts are normally incoherent and there are a lot of overlaps (Zappavigna, 2012). The hashtag conversations take the usual conversation style of speaker and respondent. However, the topic is indicated through the # symbol before the comment or response. To establish the flow of discourse content analysis was used. All the 35 hashtags and the tweets under them were streamed individually and stored as separate data sets. Then the tweets were printed and analyzed tweet after tweet to

establish how the conversation between participants takes place. The conventional rules of discourse like turn taking, addressivity, coherence, and cohesion as well as message delivery were taken into account. From the tweets, the researcher was able to establish patterns that identify hashtag conversations some of which are in line with features observed in other forms of CMD.

An example of such a conversation under #DeadBeatKenya is shown below:

**Xtian Dela Verified account @xtiandela** 16 Dec 2015

**#SocialMediaTricksKe** NEVER let Social Media fame get into your head. Tweeps forget things so fast. You will come and go. **#DeadBeatKenya**

14 retweets 5 likes

**Syombua A. Kibue @Syombuak** 21 Jun 2015

**#DeadBeatKenya** Niggers stand up and take your rolls.

0 retweets 0 likes

**Muthua @Dan\_muthua** 5 May 2015

Can't believe that the last time u tweeted **#deadbeatkenya** was trending.

0 retweets 0 likes

**Fetty Waf @Wafunya** 18 Apr 2015

**#DeadbeatKenya** “**@UberFacts**: Male ants do not have fathers because fertilized eggs become females while unfertilized eggs become males.”

3 retweets 0 likes

In all the above tweets and responses the hashtag under discussion is mentioned first then the comment. The addressee may also be mentioned preceded by the symbol @. For example in the following tweets:

**Sultan eriq @itseriq** 16 Jan 2015

yoh my son? @kamaufamous:"@NightrunnersKE:am always attracted to pregnant women and i don't know why!" Attention **#DeadBeatKenya** tumempata!

2 retweets 0 likes

**Søphísticatéd Prick @SirCarie** 10 Jan 2015

Ivi ndo **#DeadBeatKenya** ilianza "**@Eizeh**: I always do"**@kenyan\_dude**: @\_ZAWADII: Unacum ndani na huna kazi."""

1 retweet 0 likes

The discourse of online community members sometimes shows a lot of incoherence and lack of cohesion and this was also observed in the hashtag discourse. The incoherence in tweets may be due to imposed conventions by the platform itself. Twitter allows 140 characters in one tweet (Zappavigna 2012). In such a case the result of engagement between participants is less than a turn in the conversation especially if the message is broken and continued later on in the other tweets. In most CMD there are interruptions and overlaps in the flow of discourse. For instance, unrelated messages may be posted in the conversation as seen below In some posts emojis (cartoon like symbols) are used as a strategy to give a message in one symbol rather than words with many characters.

**JOSEPH BARASA @BarasaJoseph** Apr 2

**@KTNKenya @Michellengele** : Who is tht person who has just passed infront of the camera on a live broadcast? **#147IsNotJustANumber**

In reply to **Tinah Korosso (TK)**

**Ojwang wa Diani @JButunyi** 1 Oct 2015 **@radiomaisha #Duuuuuuuh #SomeOneTellMugabe** hapo sasa **#maishajioni #maishajioni #maishajioni**

**Tinah Korosso (TK) @TinahKorosso** 1 Oct 2015

Tinah Korosso (TK) Retweeted G.Kakai Kulabusia

**#Duuuuuuuh #SomeOneTellMugabe** Matusi hatutaki! **#maishajioni #maishajioni #maishajioni @radiomaisha**

Tinah Korosso (TK) added,

**G.Kakai Kulabusia** @kulabusia

**@TinahKorosso @UKenyatta** This is an insult or reference point!!!@Ken\_Lusaka  
<https://twitter.com/KTNNews/status/649582065042612224> ...

**Okulo Jnr @Okulo Jnr** 1 Oct 2015

Okulo Jnr Retweeted ktn

Just shot at himself. **#KOT** see this **#IHavetoComeToKnowThat #someonetellmugabe** is the next TT

In the above tweets it is not possible to tell if the hashtag under discussion is #SomeoneTellMugabe or #147IsNotJustANumber. The people tweeting seem to overlap each other and disobey turn taking and adherence to topic. In normal conversations these gaps and overlaps are taken as against turn-taking rules as explained by Sacks, et al (1974). Sometimes there are unpredictable and lengthy gaps between tweets that involve two participants exchanging information. The tweets cited show consistent disruptions of turn-taking and turn-adjacency. The messages are posted as received by the system which receives numerous posts. Therefore two people who may have been exchanging views are disrupted by other posts in-between. In CMD various strategies are used to ensure the minimization of these disruptions and ensure messages are received by the recipients intended. One strategy is ensuring that the person doing the posting of the message mentions the addressee in the next post using the @ symbol. This practice is called *addressivity* (Herring, 1999a). According to Herring (1999a) addressivity is a strategy adopted by users to adapt to constraints of turn-taking in multi-participant synchronous CMD. All the tweets analyzed exhibit the characteristic of addressivity in turn-taking.

Another feature in the flow of hashtag discourse is *linking* and *quoting* previous tweets and messages so as to create turn adjacency in the conversation. In the tweets below linking is done to persons or events so as to turn the conversation towards the mentioned recipient or issue. The linking of URLs in the tweets and also tagging of persons outside the conversation is another feature that is commonly used in the hashtags.

**Akindayo Ayodeji @Dope dej** Feb 12

But today was supposed to be **#BabaWhileYouWereAway**. What happened **@adeyanjudeji** and **@Omojuwa**. Me I have my tweet prepared.

**Biodun #LetsGist @Amourab** 4 Nov 2015

It started from **#BabaWhileYouWereAway** to # PMB to **#PMB100Days #BabagoSlow #BuhariOptics** I pray we don't get 2 **#PMBOut** soon

**#IAmJubilee @DavidMaina N** 3 Nov 2015

**#SomeoneTellMugabe** or **#SomeoneTellUhuru** Fact is we are on an all time low as a country in terms of condoning... <http://fb.me/2fmCtJ75r>

**fidel juma @fullangenge** 3 Nov 2015

**#someonetellmugabe** that he is very right **#countryofthieves #kot @UKenyatta @WilliamsRuto**

This finding is in agreement with Herring (1999a) who says that the use of linking and quotes creates an illusion of adjacency in a message and juxtaposes two turns (an initiation and a response) in one message. If messages or people in a previous tweet are continuously quoted and responded to it creates the appearance of an extended conversation. The fact that the hashtag is quoted in every tweet is a strategy to ensure that posts keep to the topic. The @ symbol before an addressee keeps the turns visible in the conversation. This mention then effectively allocates the turn to the recipient.

#### **4.5.4.3 Trending Period of Hashtags**

The trending period in this study refers to the duration of time within which a hashtag is highly active. A hashtag's lifespan is not easily predictable. Hashtags that were formulated in 2014 and 2015 such as #BabaWhileYouWereAway and #147IsNotJustANumber are still getting sporadic tweets in 2017. However immediately a hashtag is formulated and goes viral (gets widely popularized) it has a period within which a lot of tweeting and Retweeting takes place. It is also the period when Twitter Trends.com is able to geolocate the tweet and analyzes the trend.

To establish the trending period of the 35 hashtags, the researcher used the Survey Monkey tool as well as Twitter Trends.com. This site gives the trending hashtag of the day and one can be able to establish how long a tweet was trending by just counting the days it appeared on Twittertrends.com. This site is able to geolocate hashtags and therefore the researcher was able to follow the sampled Kenyan hashtags. Through this method the researcher listed the 35 hashtags and counted the number of days each hashtag was trending. The trending period was important in this

research as the assumption was that the longer a tweet trends the more likely it is to get responses from a large number of members of the public and therefore be able to shape their opinions. From the data collected, the shortest trending period for the sampled hashtags was one week and the longest was sixteen weeks as shown in the table below. The trending period for each hashtag is shown in Appendix 2.

**Table 4.17: Trending Period of Hashtags**

	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Trending period	1	16	5.17	3.111

The trending period is presented statistically in the table below. The mean score of trending period of hash tags was 5.17 weeks. The standard deviation was 3.111 and this implies that there is a wide range of the trending periods from the mean trending period. The minimum trending period of hashtags was 1 week and the maximum trending period was 16 weeks respectively.

To get complimentary information on the trending of hashtags respondents were asked what makes a hashtag trend. 32 of the 36 respondents which translate to 90% of them talked about the topic or issue under debate. Controversial and political issues seemed to trend more and last longer as is the case in the hashtags #BabaWhileYouWereAway, #JehovahWanyonyi, and #147IsNotJustANumber. These hashtags are still active though sporadically even though they were formulated in 2014 and 2015. This finding concurs with that Suh, et al (2010) who says that political hashtags on Twitter tend to be more persistent than other topics and once they go viral they remain in time and space. The argument was that once political hashtags become viral they obey what is called the *contagion principle*, which maintains that repeated exposure to an idea is vital when the idea is controversial or contentious. #JehovahWanyonyi for example is not a political hashtag but a religious one that raises controversy over a human being who claims to be God.

A significant finding of this research is that the citizens who develop the hashtags do not really care if the mainstream media picks up the hashtag or not. The hashtag is

released online and the freedom of debate and expression either accelerates the hashtag and it goes viral or it dies upon getting low uptake. Not all hashtags trend or get good responses. Some die without a single mention or retweet. The respondents revealed that in the Kenyan scenario the hashtags that tend to trend most are political, those that are humorous and have a sexual connotation such as #SaltBae and those that touch on issues of national importance and who every Kenyan feels a sense of ‘ownership’ towards. Hashtags that had these characteristics are like #IStandWithKDF, #147IsNotJustANumber, #SomeoneTellCNN and #RapeDoctor. The issue regime was found to have a significant effect on the trending period of the hashtag. The political issues seem to dominate the trends while the least trending are economic ones as observed in the situational context results above.

To complement the results obtained from content analysis conducted on the tweets on the hashtags, the researcher interviewed respondents on the factors that make a hashtag trend. This is because not all hashtags trend as some do not get beyond the first post.

The journalists were asked to indicate the factors that make a hashtags to trend in the media houses and in the public. The following were the responses:

Participant 1: *The relevance of the hashtags e.g. politically. The source (person who started it.*

Participant 2: *Politics, Kenyan controversies, sports especially football, social events e.g. safaricom Drives, artists e.g. #DiploInKenya (A popular artist i.e producer and musician).*

Participant 9: *Simplicity of the hashtag, Conciseness of the hashtag, How much it can catch i.e it's relevant and durability over time, how interesting it.*

Participant 4: *The source of the hashtags be it individuals or shows such as how popular the source is and their level of influence*

Participant 7: *The relevance of the hashtags to current events*

Participant 5: *Time the hashtag is posted, celebrities or people who are likely to be affected, effect/the results the hashtags is likely to lead e.g. #OkoKenya lead to raise food for Kenyans in North Eastern.*

Participant 6: *The hashtag being created by a popular user such as a celebrity or an opinion leader. Intensity of a matter in terms of the number of people it affects.*

Participant 10: *The number of mentions (Retweets, shared posts, quotes). Sensationalism. News value (proximity, prominence, adding/bizarrely)*

Participant 14: *The number of people who are using the hashtag. How many people the hashtag is impacting. The topic being reflected by the hashtag*

The journalists were further asked to indicate what factors make a hashtag trend in the media houses and in the public.

Participant 16: *the issue being addressed*

Participant 2: *ability to evoke emotion*

Participant 12: *need to make the public aware of issues. Need to make audience interact with the media content*

Participant 4: *'the level of public participation, the 'catchiness'*

Participant 18: *'Relevance, timing, importance, prominence, oddity, proximity'*

The respondents were asked why some trends trend better than others on Twitter and even get national attention while others do not. Their responses included the following.

Participant 1: *Sensitivity of an issue. If it is touching on an important person it tends to really trend.*

Participant 2: *It depends on who comes up with a hashtag. If it is a popular person like Cyprian Nyakundi or Xtiandela then it will trend.*

*Participant 3: If the issue touches on a serious matter like terrorism, flooding, tragedies like the Huruma one, people react to it faster and in high numbers because it affects them.*

*Participant 17: People love politics so anything political goes. Tragedies also trend more since they are more emotive.*

*Participant 11: The wording. If the words are funny and yet deep the hashtags trends more. Good example, #BabaWhileYouWereAway- Kenyans could identify with the symbol of a father and what can go wrong when he is away.*

From these responses, one can infer that hashtags trend due to factors like relevance of topic, relevance of the hashtags to the respondents, the simplicity of the wording meaning that it needs to use language that is easy to grasp, political issues, how sensational the hashtag is, and how much tweeting and Retweeting is taking place online. The more people respond to a hashtag the faster and the longer it trends. Out of the 36 respondents 25 talked about topic relevance and politics as key factors while 10 felt that response from other tweeps influenced trending and 2 respondents felt that the hashtag needed to be sensational for it to trend.

The results on trending were further subjected to a statistical analysis so as to establish the influence of the trending period of the hashtag on the formation of public opinion. The results are presented in Table 4.18 present the fitness of model used in the regression model to explain the study phenomena. Trending Period provides a moderately good fit in predicting changes in formation of public opinion. This is supported by coefficient of determination also known as the R square of 26.01%. This means that the duration of time a hashtag trends online explains 26.01% of the variations in the dependent variable which is formation of public opinion. These results further means that the model applied to link the relationship of the variables provided a relatively good fit.

**Table 4.18: Model of Fitness for Trending Period of Hashtag**

Indicator	Coefficient
R	0.51
R Square	0.2601
Adjusted R Squared	0.2559
Std. Error of the Estimate	0.18353

Results can either be significant or insignificant. Statistically significant is the likelihood that a relationship between two or more variables is caused by something other than random chance. The study used p-values to explain the significance of the results. Regression of coefficients results in Table 4.19 shows that trending period and formation of public opinion are positively and significant related ( $p=0.003$ ). This is because the probability value (P-value = 0.003) which was less than the critical p value ( $p -\text{value} =0.05$ ). This implies that trending period of hash tags have an impact on formation of public opinion.

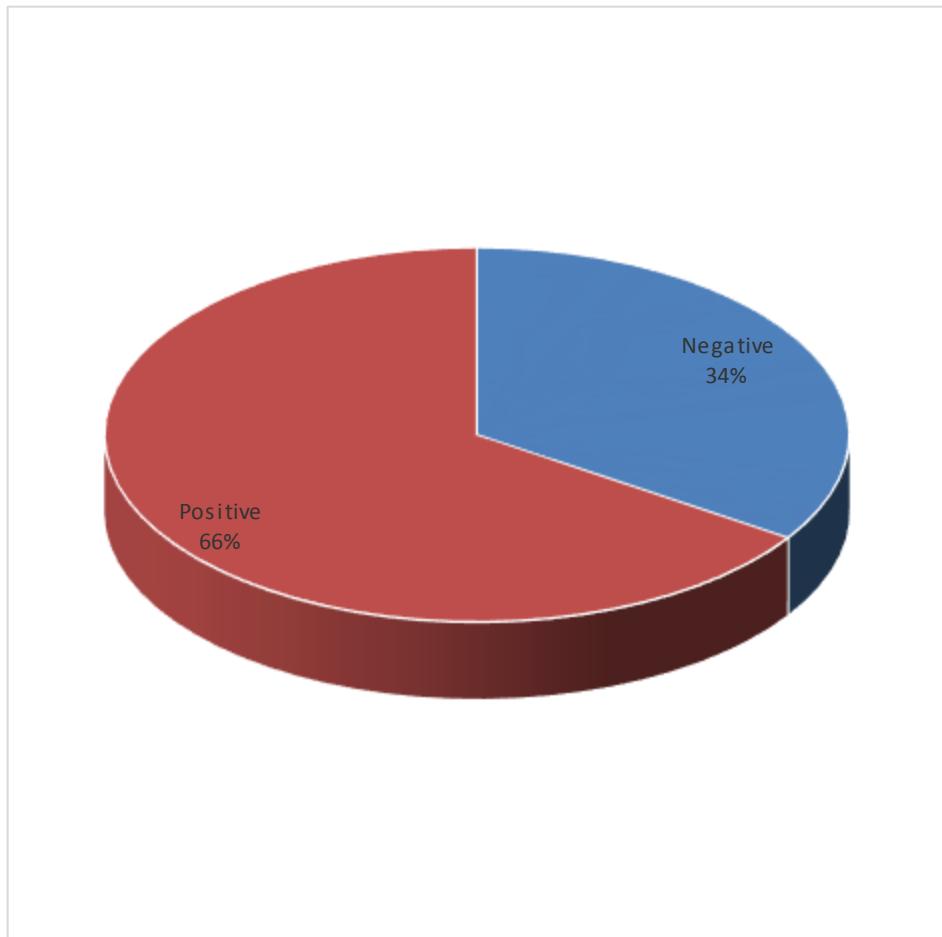
**Table 4.19: Regression of Coefficients**

	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
(Constant)	5.365	0.195	27.499	0.000
Trending period	-0.007	0.032	-0.216	<b>0.003</b>

#### 4.5.4.4 Types of Responses

In any given discourse, feedback is important. In the hashtag discourse the responses of the respondents through tweets is what provides this feedback and it determines if the hashtag gets an impact or not. Eventually opinions are shaped as people exchange information online through the tweets and retweets. To find out the kind of responses that tweeps gave in the hashtag discourse, all the tweets under each hashtag were downloaded and printed for easier analysis and classification of the responses. The responses were categorized as positive, negative, neutral or irrelevant to the topic under discussion. The words chosen by the respondent determine the nature of response. The views that the participants gave in the tweets were either individual or

collective. The positive responses were those that reinforced the message in the hashtag. The negative responses opposed the view held by the hashtag. Neutral responses took a middle ground while the irrelevant responses had no relationship at all to the hashtag under discussion. The 35 hashtags had all these responses as different views and opinions were expressed on the issue regime. Only responses given during the trending period were taken into consideration in the study. These responses were categorized and counted per hashtag. The responses in hashtag discourse are the tweets and mentions under every hashtag. More positive responses meant that the hashtag gained more acceptance by the public and had more influence. The hashtags #147IsNotJustANumber, #DepotRutoPilot and #RapeDoctor received a high number of positive responses at 82%, 78% and 69% respectively. This means that a lot of Kenyans on Twitter wanted the issues addressed and dealt with. The negative responses could also have the same effect since the issue has developed a certain opinion among members of the public. The hashtag #StopTheDrunkPresident had a negative response rate of 65% meaning that it received a lot of bashing from those in support of the president and less support from those opposed to his behaviour. However it still trended and was influential enough to make the presidential digital team to create the hashtag #MyPresidentMyChoice. Neutral responses were few as most people who respond to a hashtag want to express their view on it. The other observation was that all the 35 hashtags were based on issues that had been featured in mainstream media sometimes both radio and television and so the hashtag gave a platform through which respondents would express their opinion on an issue of national importance. Irrelevant responses were also few. They are disruptors of discourse and can interfere with coherence. The figure below shows the distribution of hashtags with positive and negative responses as those are the ones directly influencing public opinion formation. The figures are based on the average for each hashtag in terms of the number of positive or negative responses.



**Figure 4.6 Type of Responses**

The results showed that 23 of the 35 hashtags had positive responses as the majority of responses while 12 had majority of responses being negative, which is 66% and 34% respectively. From the above distribution we infer that most of the 35 hashtags received positive support from the public with the majority of the tweeps expressing opinions in agreement with the opinion expressed by the creator of the hashtag. For example, a hashtag like #SomeoneTellCNN received 88% positive response meaning that a majority of KOT were in support of the opinion that the dignity and sovereignty of Kenya had been trampled on and that needed to be stopped. Anger was expressed by a majority of them after CNN referred to Kenya as a hot bed of terror. This hashtag was so influential globally that CNN was forced to apologize especially after the Kenyan president expressed displeasure with the media house and

asserted that Kenya was a hot bed of opportunities and champions. This then led to the formation of the hashtag #HotBedOfApologies, a hashtag that was negatively framed and where lots of negative responses towards CNN were given. These results indicate that the type of responses, whether positive or negative, given to a hashtag directly influence the general opinion formed by the public. Positive responses can also be those that generally show a positive attitude towards issues while negative response is the opposite where a tweep takes a negative stand from an individual's point of view.

The following tweets show some of the responses expressing individual opinion as analyzed from hashtag #HotBedOfTerror:

**Tweet 1:** Positive response. The tweep sees the need to have a positive despite the hashtag having a negative connotation.

**Weldon khalif @weldikhalifa** Aug 20

How i wish the journalist who branded us as the **#hotbedofterror** is seeing how our athletes are bagging medals at **#rio2016**

0 retweets 1 like

**Tweet 2:** Negative response. The respondent is taunting the west for calling Kenya a hot bed of terror while France is also a victim.

In reply to **BBC Breaking News**

**Fredy matiba @Freddy matiba** Jul 26

**@bbcbreaking** its like France is now the playing field of terrorists **#hotbedofterror**

0 retweets 0 likes

**Tweet 3:** Positive Response that shows the collective view that Africans are being unfairly targeted by whites where terrorism is concerned. It is call for Africans to stand with one voice and refuse the label of being a hot bed of terror.

**K NgugiII @K NgugiII** Jul 25

**#HowAfricanAreYou** to rally criticisms against western bashing for unlawful and untrue reporting. E.g **#Hotbedofterror**

0 retweets 0 likes

In reply to **Road Alerts**

**wyclef jaica yedah @JaicaYedah Jul 14**

**@roadalertske @ntvkenya** EU n **@POTUS** should also give travel advisories to France the way it did to **#kenya #hotbedofterror**

Tweet 4: Irrelevant response about the lions getting out of Nairobi National Park yet the #HotBedOfTerror is still tagged in the tweet. The tag on magical Kenya is a totally different issue. However the participants continue with the conversation on #HotBedOfTerror in the tweets that follow. Magical Kenya may have been sarcastically used here since it is normally used to promote tourism and the beauty of Kenya as a country.

**Lia Marta @LiaMarta33 Feb 18**

Lia Marta Retweeted LINUS KAIKAI

Prison Break, Kenyan style... **#Magicalkenya, #hotbedofterror**

Lia Marta added,

**LINUS KAIKAI @LinusKaikai**

KWS SEARCHING for six lions in Langata, Nairobi, that have escaped from the Nairobi National Park. <http://m.nation.co.ke>

0 retweets 0 likes

In reply to **Reuters TV**

**Carrie in Miami @CarrieInMiami Feb 4**

Since journalism is about informing the public and getting their feedback or responses to the news, the media respondents were asked to indicate what informed the new trend of journalist using the hashtag symbol to identify new topics for their audience. Some of their responses are:

Participant 11: *It was a reaction to what social media was becoming. Need to be part of the social media conversation.*

Participant 22: *During breaking news .Different guests have different hashtags.*

Participant 3: *It is easier to keep tabs on who is contributing to your topic when you use a hashtag.*

Participant 4: *It is a way of paying special attention to news.*

Participant 15: *To won the news item. To identify themselves*

Participant 9: *the fact that hashtags tend to pull more people together*

Participant 19: *Makes it easy to engage with the audience in terms of feedback generation*

Participant 8: *it has been informed by the fact that there is need to uniquely identify these shows thus*

The responses show that the media also relies on the responses of the public online to make decisions about news and other feature stories. If responses to their hashtags are positive or negative then they adjust accordingly. Therefore the opinion expressed by the public towards these hashtags informs media decisions too.

A statistical analysis of these findings was done to further explain the role of the type of response given in a hashtag discourse. Statistical results can either be significant or insignificant. Statistically significant is the likelihood that a relationship between two or more variables is caused by something other than random chance. The study used p-values to explain the significance of the results.

The results in table 4.10 indicated that type of responses had a significant influence on public opinion ( $P\text{-value} = 0.011$ ). This is because the probability value ( $P\text{-value} = 0.011$ ) which was less than the critical p value ( $p\text{-value} = 0.05$ ). This implies that the type of responses on hash tags have an impact on formation of public opinion. The standard deviation of negative responses of formation of public opinion was less than 1 (0.52718) implying that the answers of the respondents were not wide spread from the mean (5.305). The standard deviation of positive responses of formation of public

opinion was less than 1 (0.61718) implying that the answers of the respondents were not wide spread from the mean (5.3404).

**Table 4.20: Type of Responses**

	<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>P-value</b>
<b>Public Opinion</b>	Negative	12	5.305	0.52718	
	Positive	23	5.3404	0.61718	<b>0.011</b>

#### **4.5.4.5 Hypothesis Testing for Nature of Hashtag Discourse**

The hypothesis was tested by using t - test. The acceptance/rejection criteria was that, if the p value is greater than 0.05, the  $H_0$  is not rejected but if it's less than 0.05, the  $H_0$  fails to be accepted. The null hypothesis was that there is no significant relationship between nature of Hash tag and formation of public opinion. Results in Table 4.13 above show that the p-value was  $0.000 < 0.05$ . This indicated that the null hypothesis was rejected hence there is a significant relationship between nature of Hash tag context and formation of public opinion.

#### **4.5.4.5 Formation of Public Opinion**

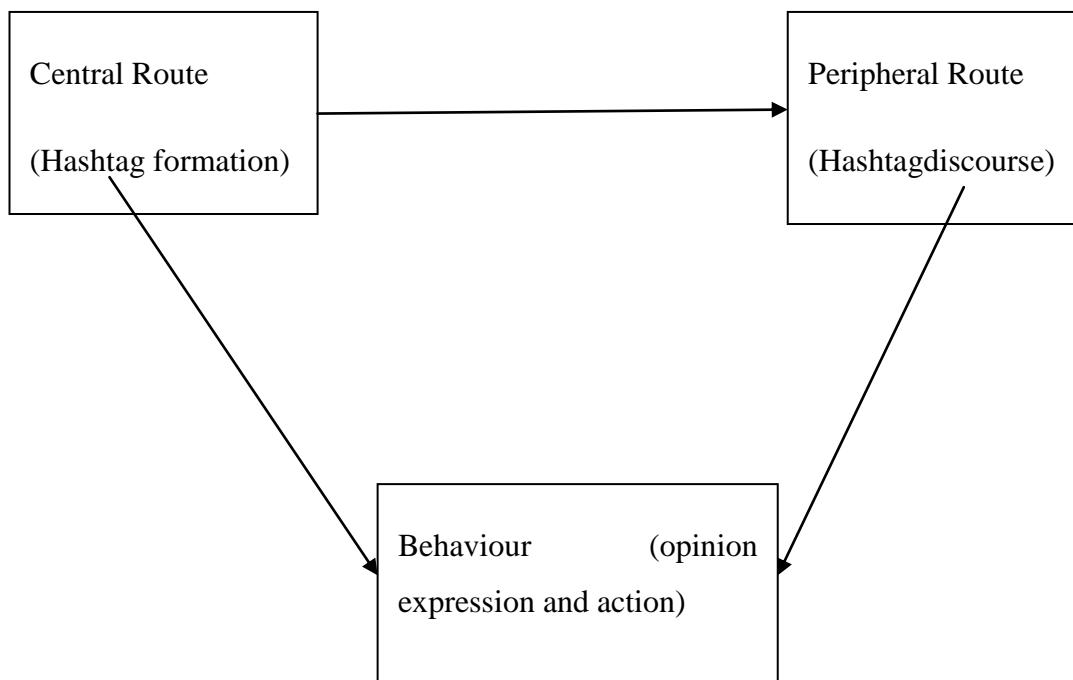
The general objective of the research was to find out if the hashtags being formulated by Kenyans have been able to shape the opinions formed by the public on various socio-political issues in Kenya. Formation of public opinion in this research was the dependent variable that was analyzed in terms of whether the framing, the context, the nature of hashtag discourse online and the actors in that discourse really influenced the opinion formed. The 35 hashtags under study were analyzed statistically using P- values and regression analysis of the variables and found to have an influence on the formation of public opinion on sociopolitical issues in Kenya. This opinion could be inferred from the online responses. The researcher was

also able to obtain complementary information from interviews on whether the hashtags had any influence on the opinion held by the public on the different issues. This was important because opinion may not be very explicit in the tweets. Both public and media respondents were interviewed in a bid to get the concept of public opinion formation and find out if the hashtags were used to shape public opinion on these issues. The researcher also looked at the effects that the hashtags had in the Kenyan society in terms of media, citizens and government reactions to them. Hashtags that influenced opinion nationally were bound to get attention from the media and the government.

All the 35 hashtags and the tweets under them were streamed using survey monkey and the opinions expressed under them analyzed through content analysis by inferring meanings and opinions from the words used. Public opinions are seen as thoughts provoked or feelings provoked by words used or actions taken. This could refer to the type of public response that the message elicits, that is cognitive (thought) and affective (feeling). Opinion formation process goes through two routes; the central route and the peripheral routes. The central route involves the formation of opinions through relevant information and the peripheral route involves the formation of opinion without involving relevant information as is the case of basing opinion on the opinion of others.

Once an idea has been formed in the mind of a hashtag developer, formulated into a worded message, in this case the hashtag, and posted on Twitter, it provokes thoughts and feelings from the participants (tweeps) who then express their own opinion whether positive, negative or neutral about the issue. The expression of this opinion is the behavioral stage of public opinion formation. The behaviour exhibited may be individual or collective. From the research the behavioral aspect can be said to have begun from the time a hashtag developer reacts to an issue individually by coming up with words to describe his opinion about it, for example, #147IsNotJustANumber and #MyDressMyChoice. Once he posts this on Twitter and the public picks it up, opinions are then expressed collectively. Everyone who participates gives his own opinion about the issue. If the discourse is sustained and

the hashtag trends, the national opinion by KOTs is then formed and in some cases collective action such as demonstrations and other social events are held based on the hashtag. The #MyDressMyChoice though formulated by an individual eventually led to demonstrations within Nairobi city and as a result the President of Kenya reacted and ordered the police to arrest and prosecutes the young men who had undressed a girl over scanty dressing. The hashtag #147IsNotJustANumber led to the members of the public organizing a night vigil/funeral wake for students who lost their lives in the terror attack at Garrissa University. This process of public opinion formation and expression can be demonstrated using the model below:



**Figure 4.7: Formation of Public Opinion**

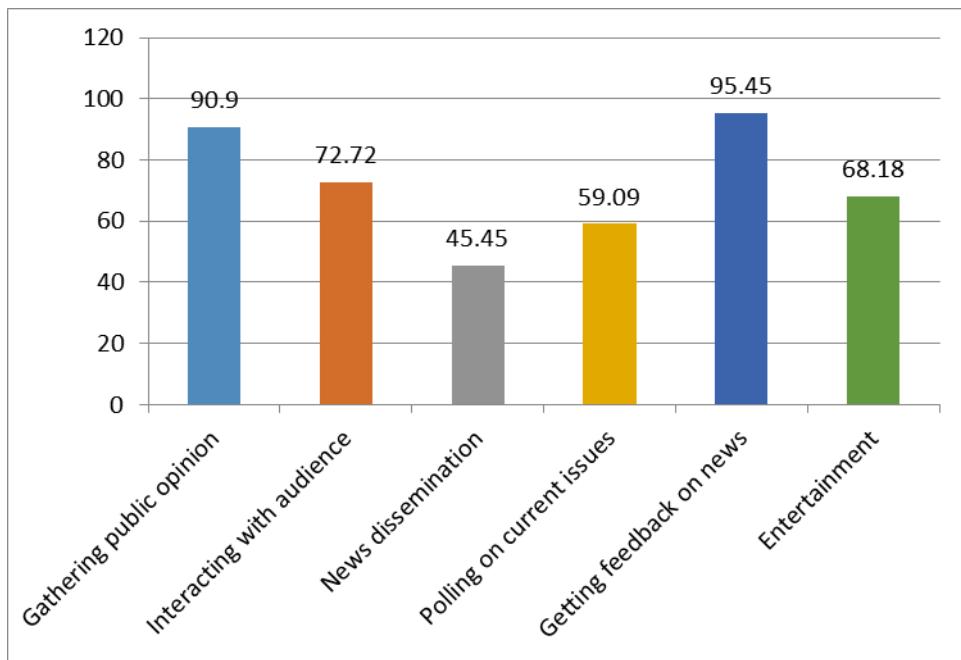
The central route involves the actual ideation and framing of hashtags upon the occurrence of an issue in social or political context. The actor in this case is the hashtag developer who may be a media personality, an ordinary citizen or a commercial hashtag developer. The hashtag will be formed as a reaction to something that happens in the country. It is therefore based on relevant information or fact. The hashtag is then posted online. The respondents to that hashtag are not its original formulators and therefore do not necessarily verify facts. The opinion they

express is peripheral and in most cases it will vary from neutral to positive to negative depending on how the message provokes their thoughts or feeling. The behavioral aspects refers to the peripheral opinion expression, the central opinion expression, which is basically participation in the discourse, and the actions that may result from these opinions such as activism, government response, fundraising and many more. Thus public opinion is here explained as a collection of individual opinions on an issue of public interest or national importance such as a terror attack, strike, an attack on national sovereignty and security as is the case in all the hashtags discussed. In the end a combination of these opinions is what influences individual, group or government policy. Not all hashtags get behavioral reactions such as demonstrations. Political ones and those that seriously address issues that have a direct impact on the lives of ordinary Kenyans do. The issue of the sexually abusive ‘gynecologist’, the pastor who was not prosecuted upon killing a passenger because he was seen as being too popular and the victim ordinary may be social issues but have a direct effect on the welfare of the ordinary citizen just like a terror attack.

To complement the findings from the hashtag data obtained online, the researcher interviewed the 36 respondents form the media, KOTs and the hashtag developers to get information on how the hashtags have been able to shape public opinion.

The general objective of this study was to establish how hashtags are used to influence opinions among Kenyans on sociopolitical issues that affect them. To obtain information towards this, media respondents were asked to indicate how they use hashtags. The question required them to answer yes or no against the aspect. The answers included using hashtags to gather public opinion, interact with the audience, disseminate news, poll on current issues, and get feedback on news and entertainment.

From the responses, it was found that 90.9% use hashtags for opinion gathering, 95.45% for getting feedback on news, and 72.72% for interacting with audiences, 68.18% for entertainment, and 59.09% for polling on current news and 45.45% on news dissemination. This is presented in the graph below:



**Figure 4.8: Use of Hash tags**

The findings on the above graph indicate that most media stations use hashtags to gather public opinion about issues and interact with the audience especially getting feedback. Most journalists indicated that they use hashtag during news for headline emphasis but not necessarily news dissemination. However all respondents both in the media and general public agreed that they use Twitter as a source of news. Majority revealed that they use a combination of Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp for news especially breaking news.

The public hash tag developers were asked to indicate whether media houses or other players like the government ever respond to hashtags formulated by independent bloggers or ordinary citizens.

The following were the responses.

Participant 1: *They certainly do look at the example of #SomeoneTellCNN-CNN wrongly titled an article and it led to backlash of the network on Twitter as a result they apologized and changed the title. Back home, we have seen the civil society, bloggers, politicians raise concerns using hashtags and government has duly*

*responded. So Yes, they do pay attention. They might always act but they will take notice.*

Participant 3: *Yes. CNN responded to #SomeoneTellCNN. It also depends on issue, it is true, important e.g. #ShutNakumattDown.*

The respondents were asked to indicate how they know an important issue. The following were the responses.

Participant 4: *Global attention or local e.g. storming an office is different.*

Participant 2: *It is how the issue affects everyone e.g. banning cars in the CBD e.g. #KideroDrums, #KideroGrass (no sense to anyone but making fun of him.*

The respondents were asked to indicate to extent they feel the hashtags have influenced how people view and respond to political and social issues. The following were the responses.

Participant 1: *Well, hashtags are simply conversations and often they are meant to influence outcomes. To what extent, that is case by case. For example, if a politician says #Boycott elections, some might others will not. Those who are influenced must share similar opinions to those who start the hashtag.*

Participant 8: *Yes there is a shift. #s have created more awareness.*

Participant 3: *People create accounts that leak and everyone then gains knowledge.*

Participant 16: *Politics and government –people are more awake and reactive.*

Participant 5: *Public reactions depends on ‘Who’ e.g. pastor arrested because he adds no value like politicians e.g. Waiguru #PanganiSix*

The respondents were further asked to indicate what makes them to respond to a hashtag.

Participant 6: *I respond to hashtags that I feel are beneficial like missing persons e.g. #BringBackOurGirls. Those that are like for singing or dancing for creating awareness. #ALSChallenge (ALS is a disease that is not well known)*

Participant 2: *Subject matter*

Participant 9: *Repetition (retweets create more interest), if it made into a meme with your social grouping e.g. WhatsApp, Instagram, its relevance to my life, issue awareness such as it is about something I know (is it within my knowledge scope)*

This response brought to light a new way of addressing social and political issues affecting Kenyans, which is creating memes based on those issues. The meme is preceded by a hashtag. Memes are usually presented as humor but have deep messages about everyday occurrences.

Participant 4: *Popularity. Topic/issues*

Participant 5: *Relevance*

Participant 3: *The topic, if it is related to my personal life; if it is likely to affect me, friends and relatives; to get information about certain issues affecting the country*

Participant 7: *If it affects me personally, even if indirectly. How popular it is.*

Participant 8: *If it is popular. If the hashtag is symmetric or congruent with my beliefs.*

Participant 10: *The impact of the hashtag if it has a topic that concerns me. If I have an interest in the hashtags.*

The respondents were also asked to indicate what kind of hashtags they do not respond to and why. The following were the responses.

Participant 1: *Political ones especially those hashtags with redundant themes such as speaking of change that never is.*

Participant 7: *Topics that don't pick my interests e.g. #WengerOut*

Participant 10: *Those that are too long, not within my knowledge, monotonous title, those not applicable or related to my life.*

Participant 4: *Political (No care for politics)*

Participant 5: *Hashtags that are political related, natural calamities, Kenyan common mwananchi and celebrities. They tend to affect large audiences or a large segment of the consumers.*

Participant 8: *Those that sound trivial and any with negativity and hatred advances. I do not feel that warrant my engagement and I do not support hatred incitement.*

Participant 6: *Those on political divide, ethnicity, secret government operations, hate speech. There is close monitoring by the government authorities.*

Participant 9: *Hashtags that originate from credible sources because they will have an impact on many people. Like those from media houses and corporate.*

The respondents were asked to indicate whether it matters who comes up with a hashtag on Twitter. This question was meant to address the element of source. Studies done previously indicate that for a message to succeed and get many responses its source plays a part. In this study source referred to the creator of the hashtag. Majority of the respondents indicated that it does matter who comes up with the hashtag. The following were the responses.

Participant 10: *Yes. The level of influence of the hashtag developer matters.*

Participant 2: *No, No*

Participant 13: *Yes. Especially based on level of influence, popularity*

Participant 4: *Yes. Hashtags generated by important persons and celebrities tend to trend as compared to common mwananchi generated hashtags*

Participant 15: *Yes. A hashtag created by a popular user will get more retweets and attention than one created by a less popular user.*

Participant 6: *Yes. The person must be a popular social media figure for the hashtag to trend. For example, Xtiandela, Cyprian Nyakundi and media personalities like Gichuru and Jeff Koinange.*

Participant 7: *Yes. If it is from a prominent person then it will trend.*

The respondents were further asked to indicate whether they ever respond to the hashtags formulated by media houses. Majority of the respondents indicated yes. The following were some of the responses.

Participant 11: *Yes, No*

Participant 2: *Yes, #TheJumpOff (on radio program)*

Participant 18: *Yes. #TTTT (The trend show)*

Participant 4: *Yes. #JKL-MigunaMiguna, #MainaKingangi\_Women*

Participant 5: *Yes. Citizen TV #BigQuestion*

Participant 16: *Yes. JKL Show*

Participant 9: *Yes. Peaceful elections*

The respondents were further asked to indicate what kind of responses the trending hashtags been getting from members of the public. The following were the responses

Participant 1: *This depends on the topic, and the nature. If it is a hashtag to influence change, it gets a positive response. If it is abusive, it receives backlash. Either way, the response are still many and overwhelming.*

Participant 4: *Mostly resistive reactions.*

Participant 10: *Excellent*

Participant 16: *The trending hashtags get a lot of retweets so the information spreads faster.*

Participant 17: *Both positive and negative responses.*

The respondents were further asked to indicate whether the responses they get from audience are utilized in any way by the media house and/or journalist. The following were the responses.

Participant 19: *Yes, they are read on air. Digital reporters will write a story and put it online. For example if they are picked on K.O.T #s and their reactions.*

Participant 2: *Yes, Wrong information by media house is corrected .The public gives a new story. The public can suggest/propose programs based on a certain feature.*

Participant 3: *Yes, Responses mostly lead to a follow up of a story or an improvement of a product offered by the media house. They also help us improve or tone down on delivery of news or programmes.*

Participant 6: *Yes. They give pointers on what the public views as being most important and what deserves coverage by media.*

Participant 17: *Yes. It is just that anchors don't just read out all comments*

Participant 9: *Yes. The feedback is always analyzed and if it is possible to make certain corrections and adjustments, they are done.*

The respondents were also asked if they think that the hashtags have been able to shape the opinion of the public in social and political issues in Kenya. They responded as follows.

Participant 3: *Yes. For instance the famous #DabOfShame, a hashtag that was used to troll president Uhuru Kenyatta and criticize him for campaigning instead of helping starving Kenyans.*

Participant 12: *It depends on what the topic is. When the public feels it is being targeted unfairly then it shifts the opinion. E.g. #KofiOlominde scuffle and #ArrestRutoPilot.*

Participant 13: *Yes. Most people opt for more popular news items. The more frequent an opinion is passed, the more people adopt it and make decisions based on other past experiences.*

Participant 19: *Yes, by offering voice to people to air their views, thereby attracting attention of the authorities.*

Participant 5: *Yes. People lift content from others opinion on a particular hashtag with intent of using it against someone or a particular brand or company.*

Participant 6: *Yes. A majority of people especially on Twitter use hashtags because they exist so their opinions are instantly shaped by that.*

Participant 17: *Yes. People are now able to have a wider scope on the issues being discussed rather than one side of the coin to a story.*

From the responses above it is evident that the hashtags have been able to influence and shape public opinion in Kenya. Twitter is seen as a good source of news and since prominent people and government and its agents use it, most Kenyans look up information in Twitter. Hashtags help to direct debates online and keep people's conversation on topic.

This study agrees with the findings of Gazzar (2013) who says that public opinion is influenced by factors like the environment, mass media, interest groups, organizations, opinion leaders and other social entities. The hashtags arise from a certain social or political environment. The mass media in this case is the increasingly powerful social media. The hashtags are formed by people of different social categories such as media personalities, bloggers, activists, representatives of lobby groups (one such group calls itself KOT) and even government agencies. These individuals are also seen as opinion leaders especially popular bloggers who

double up as celebrities. Respondents expressed this view when they said that if the hashtag is formulated by popular bloggers then the chances of it trending are high. The government even hires bloggers as online opinion shapers.

For a hashtag to be said to be relevant, it needs to get adequate responses online otherwise it fizzles out and leaves no impact. Bastos, et al (2013) contend that there is a strong linear relationship between the number of followers and the retweet rate. This means that the larger the user's audience, the higher the chances of the tweet being retweeted. Most of the hashtags that trended had a political inclination. This research found that the political hashtags tend to be more persistent than other topics. The message in the form of a hashtag goes through the gate (that is goes viral) it can remain in time and space. Hashtags of 2013 are still getting tweets. This is in agreement with Suh (2009) who says that political messages tend to spread through the network in line with the contagion principle which states that repeated exposures to an idea are vital when the idea is contentious or controversial.

To further test the formation of public opinion a statistical analysis of different aspects of opinion formation was done. The respondents were asked to give scores of between 0 and 10 to the formation of public opinion. The scores were given on how the respondent perceived the hashtag, that is, whether the opinion was based on thought processes that involve reasoning (cognitive response), feelings (affective response), neutral response (peripheral) or a strong ownership of the issue at hand (central) or whether the opinion was based on other people's opinion (collective). For each of the 35 hashtags the respondents were asked to give a score based on these elements based on what they think about the hashtag. The results showed that the mean score of cognitive response was 4.34 with a standard deviation of 1.939. The minimum score of cognitive response was 3 and maximum score of cognitive response 8. The mean score of affective response was 6.14 with a standard deviation of 1.942. The minimum score of affective response was 2 and the maximum score was 8. In addition the results showed that, the mean score of central process was 4.09 with a standard deviation of 2.005. The minimum score of central process was 1 and maximum score of central process was 8. The results also showed that, the mean

score of peripheral process was 6.31 with a standard deviation of 1.711. The minimum score of peripheral process was 2 and maximum score of peripheral process was 9. The results also showed that, the mean score of individual behavior was 4.69 with a standard deviation of 2.298. The minimum score of individual behavior was 2 and maximum score of individual behavior was 9. The results also showed that, the mean score of collective behavior was 6.4 with a standard deviation of 2.047. The minimum score of individual behavior was 2 and maximum score of individual behavior was 8 respectively. From these statistical findings the feeling one experienced after getting a hashtag formulated by another person, meaning they were peripheral in the formulation, coupled with the general view of other people in that discourse had the greatest influence on opinion formation. Individual reasoning or cognitive process had the least influence on opinion formation. The table below represents those results.

**Table 4.21: Formation of Public Opinion**

	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Cognitive	1	8	4.34	1.939
Affective	2	8	6.14	1.942
Central	1	8	4.09	2.005
Peripheral	2	8	6.31	1.711
Individual	2	9	4.69	2.298
Collective	2	8	6.4	2.047

#### **4.6 Critical Discourse Analysis of Variables**

To further explain the sociopolitical aspects especially the issue regime and the social effects of the hashtag revolution, data from all the 35 hashtags, specifically the tweets was analyzed through the Critical Discourse Analysis approach by Fairclough (1992). The view of this research is that since hashtags are not generated in a vacuum, it is important to connect them to the society that generates and for which they are generated. The framing theory and the citizen journalism approach may not adequately address these gaps. The CDA approach looks at the relationship between social power and discourse. Basically how discourse is able to shape the relations between different groups in society including using discourse to voice resistance to repressive regimes. All these issues are directly related to the opinions people hold about certain sociopolitical issues in their society.

The approach looks at discourse in three levels: the text, discursive practice and the social practice. The conversations on the hashtags will be analyzed while focusing on the four research variables; framing, context, actors and nature of discourse. The text is described in terms of the formal properties or linguistic characteristics. The text is seen as both a resource and a product of the process of interpretation. The relationship between interaction and social context refers to the social determination of the process of production and interpretation and their social effects. The objective on framing was seen as the stage of text formation where formal properties of the text are assigned. The actors are the source and interpreters of the text. The variable

of nature of discourse was taken as the stage of consumption of the texts, hereby hashtags. The context in this study was taken as the relationships between texts, processes and their social conditions of production and consumption.

#### **4.6.1 Text**

This level of analysis focused on the linguistic features of the hashtag as the text under investigation. CDA must begin at the text level (Fairclough and Wodak, 2011). In the CDA approach the text can be analyzed under the description of formal properties stage and the inter-textuality stage. Wodak and Krzyzanowski (2008) say that every communication event like an interview, a focus group debate or visual symbol is embedded in an immediate text. The text is seen as having two levels, the internal co-text and the inter-textual sociopolitical context.

##### **4.6.1.1 Internal co-text**

This level analyzes the formal/linguistic properties of text. The first objective of the study was to investigate how framing of hashtags would influence the formation of public opinion in socio-political issues. Framing in the study was the text formation stage. The researcher investigated the individual hashtags linguistically using content analysis.

The 35 hashtags were found to have been given wording deliberately. There seems to be a generally accepted way of arranging words in the texts that follows some international convention identifying this genre. In the hashtags, use of punctuation is totally ignored. Emotive words are chosen as opposed to those with a flat feel. This was observed in the 35 hashtags which used words that call for action, show anger, excitement or a humour and ended up trending. This can be deduced in the number of mentions shown on table in Appendix 4. Lexicon choice in the hashtag refers to naming and referencing. For example, #147IsNotJustANumber, the use of the words “not just” is a deliberate choice of words to touch emotions and get the government to take the terror attack more seriously. Vocabulary and word choice is important in CDA. Words that are emotive are selected for better response and acceptance.

In the media, framing is said to guide thinking on particularly selected issues. Hashtags are framed in a way that is easy to grasp, culture interest and keep debates alive. The words must clearly show the issue under debate. The 35 hashtags portrayed this characteristic as can be observed in #HurumaTragedy, #UhuruVisitsKenya, #MyPresidentMyChoice, #MyDressMyChoice, #StopTheDrunkPresident, #RapeDoctor and #EducationCrisis.

#### **4.6.1.2 Intertextuality**

This term refers to the tendency of texts in a communicative event being linked to other texts, both in the past and present. These links can be established in several ways such as the continued reference to a topic, main actors, through reference to the same events and by transfer of main arguments from one text to another into the next. The sampled hashtags had these characteristics that serve to show that the discussion in social media is not done in isolation where an issue is concerned but in relation to what is happening in the Kenyan society in general. Thus, the social context of a text is important.

The researcher investigated these qualities in the streamed tweets and noted the following cases on intertextuality. In the 35 hashtags in the study 34 had cases of intertextuality.

In the hashtag #147IsNotJustANumber, the researcher noted that Twitter users kept coming with hashtags that have a related even one year after the terror attack for instance, #147IsNotJustANumber, #GarrissaMemorialMarathon, #RememberingGarrissa, #GoneButNotForgotten, #ForeverInOurHearts and #KOT#ANationUnbound. These hashtags appear together with the main hashtag which usually appears first. The tendency of using several hashtags together in one tweet is repeated in 6 out of the 35 hashtags.

Another form of intertextuality is when reference is made to a respondent and repeated in all the subsequent tweets. In this tweet for example, KOT's kept referring to the president, his deputy and terrorists as main actors: @UhuruKenyatta when will

*you visit Kenya?; @DPRuto visited Ivory Coast terror attack site but never Garrissa; We stand united and unbowed as a nation. Terror will not bend us.*

The statement “*we shall not be bowed by terror as a nation*” was repeated by the president whenever a terror attack happened on Kenyan soil. In many tweets in hashtags that were formulated following a terror attack, these words were repeated by Kenyans. This special feature shows that intertextuality can traverse time and context.

In the hashtag #StopTheDrunkPresident, intertextuality was seen in the creation of related hashtags and continuous reference to the actors. This hashtag was created by a celebrity blogger Cyprian Nyakundi to show that the president was out touch with Kenyan reality especially insecurity. The conversation was steered by bloggers, media personalities and celebs like Robert Alai and Larry Madowo. Hashtags like #StopTheDrunkPresident and #DabOfShame were used to show the disapproval of the president’s behavior. In reaction to these attacks on SM the online communication team for the president came up with the hashtag #MyPresidentMyChoice. This led to a Twitter user resulting to a metaphor *clash of the hashtags*, #StopTheDrunkPresident#MyPresidentMyChoice. This metaphor is repeated by seven tweeps in the same conversation.

Intertextuality is also seen in the hashtag #BungomaJamesBond#IfOnlyIHadOneDay which was meant to create humour online. The comments on the tweets were all related to the incident where a man decided to hang from a helicopter as is seen in the movie character James Bond style.

#### **4.6.2 Discursive Practice**

This level of CDA refers to how texts are produced and consumed. That is, the conditions of production and the interpretation of the texts in terms of assigning of meanings. The relationship between texts and social practice is mediated by discursive practices. This means that the communicators use words (texts) to discuss, analyze and interpret issues (discursive practice) within their social context (social

practice). To understand the discursive practice of the hashtags the 35 hashtags were analyzed using content analysis to determine the words used and who responds to them as seen in the tweets. The concept of words in CDA is about how the message gets worded or framed. To understand this, the researcher looked at aspects of framing as already discussed and then interviewed the 36 respondents for complementary information on text production. The researcher investigated how hashtags are formulated by asking respondents the factors they consider when coming up with a hashtag.

Some of their responses included:

Participant 1: *The length of the hashtags and audience appeal*

Participant 22: *The relevance, timing, importance, prominence, oddity and proximity. It has to make sense at that particular time.*

Participant 13: *Must be short with few words, original and cover a topic of national importance.*

Participant 4: *Emotional appeal of the hashtag is important. Hashtags that are controversial trend more.*

Participant 5: *The language used is English but if the recipients are in the lower levels of society, one may choose Kiswahili. Language matters.*

Discursive practice also refers to the consumption of texts. This entails issues like who responds to the hashtags and how they select the ones to respond to. In the process of interpretation, there may be distractors so that meaning is lost. Some of the objectives of the study were to investigate the role of the actors of the hashtags and the nature of discourse in the formation of public opinion. The actors are the hashtag creators and the respondents. This process of response is the discursive part that involves interaction among actors. The finding was that Kenyans of all social classes produced and responded to hashtags including prominent business people, media practitioners, Wanjiku and celebrities. In the hashtags, majority of the

respondents were ordinary citizens who had a tendency of tagging prominent personalities.

In this case, 34 of the 36 respondents which is 95% of the interviewees agreed that the hashtags are usually responded to by ordinary citizens who are also creators of hashtags. The media also responds to hashtags created by other players including other media houses as shown in previous examples in this chapter. The respondents react to hashtags based on factors like topic of interest, national importance and when hashtags use words that are catchy.

The conversation in various tweets shows how people interpreted meanings. In the hashtag #HotBedOfApologies Kenyans are looking at the reaction of CNN with mixed emotions. The offence of the media house was wrong titling of news item that ended up painting Kenya's image negatively. The apology was given another hashtag based on the previous one #HotBedOfTerror. This is a case of interdiscursivity. Interdiscursivity is seen when two or more hashtags related in theme or key message are produced and consumed. The following depict the feature of interdiscursivity.

**NTV Kenya** @ntvkenya CNN *regrets 'Kenya hotbed of terror' gaffe*  
**@Gladys\_Gachanja** @MarkMasai #HotBedOfApologies @LARRYMADOWO 0 retweets 0 likes

**Agatha Karimi** @Agathakarimi 14 Aug 2015

**#HotBedOfApologies**

*Now you are just being cruel #HotBedOfApologies*

*Ero Kisemei added,*

*linda christine* @appep

The emphasis on this tweet below about real anchors apologizing shows that the meaning of the message passed needs to be negotiated.

*Hotbed of terror now #HotBedOfApologies btw we want to see the apology on CNN news by those anchors who said it*

The hashtag #HurumaTragedy also shows the interaction between users as they try to interpret the message. The naming of key characters like the Nairobi governor and the president shows the need to pass the important message to the right recipient. The #HurumaTragedy was about a collapsed building due to poor construction where lives were lost. The government ordered the demolition of houses that did not adhere to the construction laws and standards but the activity of demolition was stopped mid-way and another building collapsed in Kariobangi estate, Nairobi hence the #Kariobangi in relation to #HurumaTragedy.

*0 retweets 0 likes*

JayJayWaziri @jjwaziri Aug 2

*After #hurumatragedy evictions were stopped because someone believed he was evicting his own voters now #Kariobangi*

Allan thathi @allanthathi Aug 2

@KideroEvans 200+ buildings ear marked 4 demolitions in Nairobi after the #hurumatragedy what happened? Why is #Kariobangi still happening?

Dj Double Trouble @DjDaboTrabo Aug 2

@KideroEvans @county nairobi promised to clear the mess after the #HurumaTragedy now #Kariobangi. They never care .

Nduta M @Nduts09 Jun 29

#NairobiCountyAchievements #LestWeForget #HurumaTragedy Over 150 affected after building collapses in Huruma

Duncan Ogweno @RasDunkie13 Jun 20

*what became of the #HurumaTragedy story... how many died? what became of the owner of the building? did the demolitions go on?*

JayJayWaziri @jjwaziri Jun 13

**#HurumaTragedy**, Kenyans across all tribes helped each ada. fast forward last Monday, huruma stoned, burned n looted **#RailaTheWardogSince82**

Rein @Asamoh Jun 11

*Patients admitted at KNH after #HurumaTragedy detained for nonpayment of charges. Shs 1.8B looted from NYS @disembe @IkeOjuok #BudgetKE2016*

The debate in Twitter after the death of Jacob Juma, a popular business man shows a lot of interdiscursivity and intertextuality. Actors are responding to already formulated hashtags and then anchoring their own hashtags depending on their interpretation of the message.

God's Favourite @Shallie May 23

*I doubt common petty criminals can have the resources to cleat ALL cctv footage.....nah..... #KaburiLaWazi #RIPJACOBJUMA*

0 retweets 0 likes

mozez moses @moses mozez May 23

its a simple question...yes or no...Mohammed Ali giving CID boss high blood pressure **#JichoPevu #RIPJacobJuma**

0 retweets 0 likes

Hadija Adams @Hadijaadams May 23

Murder most foul. **#RIPJacobjuma!** May your killers never again know peace.

0 retweets 0 likes

Rein @Asamoh May 23

**@MohaJichoPevu** has CCTV footages trashing theory of CID boss Muhoro. **@KTNKenya @Disembe @staceykagz #RIPJacobJuma**

4 retweets 3 likes

**Mutuku Fred TM @iammutukufred May 23**

Sasa Katika **@KTNNews @KTNKenya** : **#KaburiLaWazi #JichoPevu @MohaJichoPevu #RIPJacobJuma @kabetes @MKapombe @KTNLeo**.

2 retweets 0 likes

**Rein @Asamoh** May 23

Now watching [@KTNKenya](#) with [@MohaJichoPevu](#) about the assassination of Jacob Juma. [#RIPJacobJuma](#)

1 retweet 2 likes

Interdiscursivity is seen in the behaviour of the actors. They create hashtags and also comment on them. Thus producers may also be consumers. The Twitter users also tweet on other hashtags. Interdiscursivity and intertextuality are features of hashtag discourse that assist in formation and propagation of opinion online. Connecting issues helps people to remember them and keep the discourse alive (Zappavigna, 2017).

#### **4.6.3 Social Practice**

CDA also argues that every discourse is anchored on the social practice of the society in which it takes place. It blurs the border between conversations between and among people through texts and aspects of the society in which they belong. This concept refers to the wider social practice to which the communication event belongs. This level focuses on the issues that inform certain discourses. Phillips and Jergensen (2002) explain that the functioning of discourse referred to in CDA as discursive practice, is a social practice that shapes the world. The concept of social practice views the communication action as individual, concrete and context bound on one hand, and being institutionalized and socially anchored on the other. Thus there is a pattern of regularity.

CDA addresses social problems in the society concerned. The 35 hashtags were all based on real issues, whether political or social in the Kenyan society. Content analysis was used to analyze the social and political issues that the hashtags addressed by observing the wording and deducing meaning. These hashtags were listed and then categorized under the various themes based on the issue being addressed. There were hashtags that addressed political aspects such as

#StopTheDrunkPresident, #MyPresidentMyChoice, #UhuruVisitsKenya, #BabaWhileYouWereAway, #WhatWouldMagufuliDo? in reaction to #WaiguruDeals, and #ObamaInKenya. Other hashtags addresses social issues that Kenyans wanted addressed by the ruling elite. Twitter, through the use of hashtags gave a voice to ordinary citizens as in the hashtags #IStandWithKDF, #DepotRutoPilot, #ArrestRutoPilot, #MyDressMyChoice, #EducationCrisis and #Mollis (Kenyans used this hashtag to condemn rape and castigate those making fun in social media about a girl being raped). Still some hashtags were formed for entertainment purposes, and therefore created humour online for example, #BungomaJamesBond, #TeamMafisi and #BroOchollaMoment.

Issues affecting the nation like insecurity also led to creation of hashtags. The occurrence of terror attacks and other tragedies like collapse of buildings made Kenyans to create hashtags to express anger, sadness, pain and protest to a government that seemed oblivious of the plight of ordinary citizens affected by these tragedies. Such hashtags include: #HurumaTragedy, #147IsNotJustANumber, #GarissaAttack, #IStandWithKDF.

The occurrence of events and issues seem to inform hashtag formation. Media houses came up with hashtags in particular situations like breaking news, tragedies, and socio-political national issues like strikes and examinations. News features and other programmes have hashtags meant to allow interaction with viewers for example, #HurumaTragedy, #EducationCrisis, #CitizenWeekend, #TTTT, #TheWickedEdition, #ElectionsKe, #KCSEResults.

Social context influences the framing of the hashtags. In this case, the frames in question are frames of communication not frames of mind. It is how a message is organized depending on the context of communication. The hashtag #DepotRutoPilot was framed to communicate directly to the government the stand of the public on the issue of a pilot assaulting a female police officer. The action to be taken on the pilot is directly communicated.

Besides the analysis of the context in which communication takes place, CDA also examines the effects of this communication in the society. This study was about the influence of the hashtag revolution on the formation of public opinion on sociopolitical issues in Kenya. Content analysis was used to analyze the reactions of people through the tweets they posted under the hashtags online. However, since the hashtags touched on issues of national importance, the researcher sought to find out the actual influence the hashtags had by investigating the effect each of the hashtags had after it was formulated and consumed by Kenyans. In the Kenyan context, where hashtags formulation and use is concerned, this can be described by looking at the effects and influence of the hashtags on the government and the society at large. All the 35 hashtags investigated led to some action or social effect. This is shown in Appendix 4.

The effects of the hashtags show that no hashtag fails to elicit a response from the ruling class and its agencies if it is about national matters. Some hashtags like #IStandWithKDF, #SomeoneTellCNN, #SomeoneTellMugabe and #SomeOneTellKagame led to change or breach of policy especially in diplomatic relations, military and government operations.

These findings are in agreement with Fairclough and Wodak (1997) who argue that power relations in any society are discursive. This means that they are exercised and negotiated through discourse. In the Kenyan scene, the hashtags that are created by ordinary Kenyans on Twitter are in most cases addressing the ruling class and those that occupy the upper class. Some are explicit like #DepotRutoPilot and others are subtle like #IStandWithKDF. In the two hashtags, Kenyans are voicing their demands and expectations towards their government. The former demands that the pilot who flew the deputy president and physically assaulted a police officer be deported since he was a foreigner disrespecting Kenyans while the latter is showing the government to reconsider policy that does not allow commemoration of soldiers who lose their lives during war through a memorial service. Both of these hashtags were able to influence government decisions and even policy. The pilot was arrested and a memorial service for the fallen soldiers was held contrary to policy.

This finding is also supported by Wood and Smith (2005) who contend that online communication can be described as a form of discursive resistance that is employed to critique economic and social systems while proposing new ones. Thus, cyberspace is site to challenge dominant powers. Hashtags are forms of resistance against the ruling class in Kenya especially the political ones.

#### **4.7 Overall Regression Model**

In statistical modeling, regression analysis is a statistical process for estimating the relationships among variables. It includes many techniques for modeling and analyzing several variables, when the focus is on the relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables (or 'predictors'). The study was looking at how the formulation of hashtags influences the formation of public opinion. Four independent variables were analyzed; framing, actors, context and the nature of discourse under the sampled hashtags. To establish which of the four variables was more influential, a regression analysis was done on them. The results presented in table 4.22 present the fitness of model used in the regression model to explain if the study phenomena framing of hashtags, hashtag actors, hashtag context, and nature of hashtag discourse provides a good fit in predicting public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya. This is supported by coefficient of determination also known as the R square of 65.8%. This means that framing of hashtags, hashtag actors, hashtag context, nature of hashtag discourse explain 65.8% of the variations in the dependent variable which is public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya. These results further mean that the model applied to link the relationship of the variables was satisfactory.

**Table 4.22: Model Fitness**

Indicator	Coefficient
R	0.811
R Square	0.658

In statistics significance testing the p-value indicates the level of relation of the independent variable to the dependent variable. If the significance number found is less than the critical value also known as the probability value (p) which is statistically set at 0.05, then the conclusion would be that the model is significant in explaining the relationship; else the model would be regarded as non-significant.

Table 4.23 below provides the results on the analysis of the variance (ANOVA). The results indicate that the overall model was statistically significant. Further, the results imply that the independent variables are good predictors of formation of public opinion. This was supported by an F statistic of 41.388 and the reported P-value (0.000) which was less than the conventional probability of 0.05 significance level.

**Table 4.23: Analysis of Variance**

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	F	Sig.
Regression	5.576	4	41.388	.000
Residual	2.897	30		
Total	8.473	4		

Regression of coefficients results in table 4.24 shows that framing of hashtags and formation of public opinion are positively and significant related ( $r=0.491$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). The table further indicates that hashtag actors and formation of public opinion are positively and significant related ( $r=0.144$ ,  $p=0.015$ ). It was further established that hashtag context and formation of public opinion were positively and significantly related ( $r=0.196$ ,  $p=0.002$ ) while nature of hashtag and formation of public opinion were also positively and significantly related ( $r=0.278$ ,  $p=0.001$ )

**Table 4.24: Regression of Coefficients**

	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
(Constant)	-0.428	0.313	-1.371	0.174
Framing of Hashtag	0.491	0.089	5.551	<b>0.000</b>
Hash tag actors	0.144	0.058	2.495	<b>0.015</b>
Hash tag context	0.196	0.06	3.276	<b>0.002</b>
Nature of Hashtags	0.278	0.077	3.607	<b>0.001</b>

$$Y = Y_1 = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \epsilon$$

Where

$Y_1$ = Formation of Public Opinion

$X_1$ = Framing of Hashtag

$X_2$ = Hashtag Actors

$X_3$ = Hashtag context

$X_4$ = Nature of hashtag

$\alpha$  = the constant term

$\beta_i$ : i= 1....4 measure of the sensitivity of the dependent variable (Y) to unit change in the predictor variables  $X_1$ ,  $X_2$ ,  $X_3$ and  $X_4$ .

$\epsilon$  = is the error term which captures the unexplained variations in the model.

Thus, the optimal model for the study is;

*Formation of public opinion = -0.428 + 0.491 framing of hashtags + 0.144 hashtag actors + 0.196 hashtag context + 0.278 Nature of hashtag*

From the above regression model it was clear that framing of hashtag was the most important in formation of public on social political issues in Kenya since it had the highest B value (0.491). This implies that improvement of framing of hashtag by one unit would improve formation of public opinion by 0.491 units. Another important aspect of hashtag revolution in formation of public opinion was nature of hashtag discourse (0.278) followed by hashtag context (0.196) and hashtag actors (0.144). Therefore that improvement of nature of hashtag by one unit would improve

formation of public opinion by 0.278 units. In addition improvement of hashtag context by one unit would improve formation of public opinion by 0.196 units. Lastly improvement of nature of hashtag by one unit would improve formation of public opinion by 0.144 units. This clearly indicated that framing of hashtag is the most influential factor in formation of public opinion on social political issues in Kenya as compared with nature of hashtags, hashtag context and hashtag actors. The least influential variable on opinion formation was hashtag actors. This could be interpreted to mean that as long as a hashtag is well framed and the discourse is allowed to flow and it is within the right context then the formulator of the hashtag matters little.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals with the summary of the research findings, the conclusion and recommendations. This was done in line with the objectives of the study. Areas of further research are suggested and limitations of the study taken into account. The independent variables investigated in this study were framing of hashtags, actors in the hashtag creation and response, the nature of discourse in reference to aspects like trending time, volatility and participants and the context in which the hashtags were created. The dependent variable was formation of public opinion.

The study utilized a mixed research design in data collection and analysis with greater focus on the qualitative method and the quantitative analysis being used to complement the qualitative at analysis of data stage. The target population was six media stations sampled from 62 local free to air TV stations, six hashtag developers, thirty KOT and 67 hashtags. In total 5 television stations were investigated where 22 media personalities, 4 hashtag creators and 10 KOT were interviewed. Overall, 35 hashtags that met the criteria set in the research were analysed. The response rate was around 77% which is within acceptable threshold.

#### **5.2 Summary of Major Findings**

This section summarizes the findings obtained in chapter four in line with the study objectives which include the framing of the hashtag, actors in hashtag discourse, the nature of discourse and the context of hashtag formation and their influence on the formation of public opinion in socio-political issues in Kenya. A summary of major findings under each variable is given.

### **5.2.1 Framing of the Hashtag and Public Opinion Formation**

The first objective of the study was to establish the influence of framing of the hashtag on public opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya. To understand how framing of hashtags is done by Kenyans, the researcher utilized elements of frame analysis where the lexicon choice or wording, syntactic structure, language choice, code choice and the type of frame that emerges from the combination of these elements. Based on these elements the findings of the research are outlined below.

One, all the 35 hashtags had the two basic frames, the frame of thought and the frame of communication. The majority the hashtags had emphasis frames as opposed to equivalence frames meaning that Kenyans use hashtags to emphasize certain issues they feel need dialogue. The frame adopted by the hashtag developer was found to serve certain purposes such as identifying socio-political problems, making moral judgement about issues, suggesting solutions to problems and calling for action. The 35 hashtags revealed these roles where 42.9% were used to make moral judgement, 31.4% were used to identify problems that is create awareness, 11.4% suggested solutions to problems and 14.3% directly called for action on the issue raised in the hashtag.

Two, the lexicon choice done by hashtag creators focused on catchy, emotive, simple words that easily captured attention of hashtag respondents since millions of hashtags are posted everyday around the world. All the respondents mentioned these characteristics as what they consider when creating or responding to hashtags. Framing of hashtags was found to be dependent on context, where the choice of words was based on the issue at hand. Wording and clarity of the hashtag was therefore found to be very influential in making a hashtag trend, and therefore form public opinion, or not trend.

Three, results revealed that 91% of the hash tags were in English while only 9% were in other languages mostly a combination of Kiswahili and English. Thus, the results revealed that there was a significant effect between language choice and public

opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya. This implies that hash tags framed in English forms a high public opinion compared to other languages. Sheng was not used in the hashtag despite it being a major language among the youth and Kenyans living in urban areas. This means that Kenyans create hashtags in line with international code and practice where English is used as the international linguafranca in online discourse. Another finding was that hashtags that used Kiswahili had the feature of code mixing where English words were inserted. The use of code-mixing was found to play certain sociolinguistic roles including key message emphasis, reiteration, message qualification, clarification and emphasizing emotion. This is also an indicator that Kenyans also take their offline linguistic habits to online discourse. In day to day interactions Kenyans tend to mix their two main languages Kiswahili and English.

Four, in relation to the grammatical structure of the hashtag, the study found that 54.3% of the 35 hashtags were non-ordered while 45.7% were ordered. This is interpreted to mean that there is an insignificant influence of grammatical structure on public opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya. The hashtags were able to gain popularity whether ordered syntactically or not.

Five, the results also revealed that 51.47% of the 35 hashtags were in internet lingo and 48.3% used normal grammar. The linguistic characteristics of the hashtags were found to be unique and distinct from any other genre. These special features include lack of spacing between words in hashtags which is replaced by capitalization of every word in the clause or phrase; lack of conjunctions; poor or simplified syntactic structure and, textual representation of auditory information such as prosodic features and facial expressions that allows orality in written texts and may involve use of emojis.

Six, the study also found that framing is now being done by ordinary citizens in Twitter hashtags and in some instances the media has taken up hashtags formulated by the public. In addition the study found that a significant effect between code of hash tag and public opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya. Kenyans

seemed to respond better to hashtags whose frames were easy to grasp and relate to. These hashtags generate more public opinions in terms of mentions, tweets and retweets and influenced decision making of targeted groups be it government or private sector.

Lastly, the research reveals that there is a paradigm shift in the framing theory in this form of synchronous CMD. The citizens in Kenya frame most of the hashtags and only a small percentage of trending hashtags are formulated by media practitioners. Media framing theory suggests that frames of communication being generated by the media who not only decide what we think about (set the agenda) but also how we think about it (framing) and when we think about it (priming). The findings of this research reveal that this is now taken up by the common citizen through hashtags. In this case the finding is that the mainstream media are no longer able to practice the traditional gate-keeping since the social media sites have made it possible for many gate ways to open at the same time. The public is gate-watching and moving faster than the media in framing and priming the news through hashtags. Users of Twitter are able to receive and pass information without the mediation of media outlets. This explains why citizens formulated a higher percentage of hashtags than the media outlets.

A regression analysis run on the variables revealed that framing was the most influential variable on public opinion formation. This means that the way a hashtag is framed determines how the online audience responds to it, its online resilience and eventually ability to go viral and elicit different opinions from the public.

### **5.2.2 Hashtag Actors and the Formation of Public Opinion**

The second objective was to explain the influence of the hashtag actors on the formation of public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya. The results also revealed that 74.29% of the 35 hashtags were from ordinary citizens, 27.4% were from media practitioners and 8.57% were created by bloggers. In addition the results revealed that hash tags actors had a significant influence on public opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya. The results revealed that the creators of the

hashtags could also be consumers of the same. The source of the hashtag did not have a significant effect on the response rate hence the ability to shape public opinion as most of the hashtags were from unknown citizen. However, the respondents had an effect because if a prominent person or celebrity tweeted then the tweets and retweets increased rapidly making the hashtag trend faster and wider. However, the research seemed to reveal another paradigm shift on the generally held view that source credibility boosts a message's ability to persuade people to have certain views or perception. In the Kenyan scenario most of the hashtag creators as seen in these results are ordinary Kenyans who are not known either professionally as people with blogging or journalistic experience or socio-economically. Another important finding of this research was that in Kenya hashtags seem to attract respondents across the social and economic classes. This can be seen in the use of Kiswahili and poor grammar especially incoherent sentences in the tweets, an indicator of low literacy levels. This is a paradigm shift in that in most parts of the world Twitter is a news source for the elite.

### **5.2.3 Hashtag Context and Public Opinion Formation**

The third objective of the study was to determine the influence of the hashtag context on public opinion formation on sociopolitical issues in Kenya. The concept of context was analyzed based on two aspects of context, the internal co-text and the situational context in which the hashtag was formulated. The internal co-text refers to the linguistic structure of the hashtag described under the variable of framing above. The situational context referred to the issue regime or the socio-political events leading to the formation of the hashtag. The results revealed that 51% of the 35 hashtags were from political context, 40% were social, 6% were on insecurity especially terror and 3% were economic. The 35 hashtags were formulated when an issue in the society that was of national interest came up. Through a critical discourse analysis of the co-text and the situational context, the research found that words selected to raise an issue determined if the issue got attention or not. Another finding in relation to co-text was that the hashtags portrayed the characteristics of intertextuality and interdiscursivity where elements of previous hashtags and tweets are integrated in the

subsequent tweets hence creating continuity of discourse on issues. This interaction also served to bridge the gap between online and offline discourse on important national issues.

The study also found that hashtags were used as a form of discursive resistance by the ordinary Kenyans who produced the hashtags to raise awareness and resist government action or inaction on certain issues. They were found to mobilize and organize group discussions around a topic even as participants are able to make idiosyncratic expressions on the Kenyan issues. The results also revealed that hashtag context had a significant influence on public opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya. The interviews on the respondents also revealed important findings on factors that make a hashtag trend or fail to trend.

Respondents gave different factors but there were certain factors that featured in all the answers of the respondents and which constitute key findings of this research. The CDA approach by Fairclough argues that discourse is based on the communicative event (field) and the discursive event which refers to the production and consumption of text. In order for the hashtags (texts) to be produced and responded to (discursive process) there must be certain conditions in the situational context all of which form a successful communicative event. In this research the conditions refer to the factors that make the hashtag trend or get many mentions and have a higher volatility in the SM. Some of the factors raised included: the relevance of the hashtag to current events and to the general public or individual's life; the source of the hashtag with celebrities and bloggers attracting more responses; the topic/issue under discussion with politics, sports, controversies, humanitarian drives such as hunger or human rights abuse, social events, sensationalism and tragedies being raised; the number of mentions and retweets that the hashtag gets. The length and wording of the hashtag was also mentioned with the statement that "the hashtag must be catchy" being given by respondents. Another argument was that hashtags are the new way of getting information on what is happening in socio-political events.

On the situations that led to the creation of hashtags, the respondents gave issues like tragedies, controversial social issues, breaking news, issues of national interest (meaning they affect a majority of the population) and the oddity of an issue. Another finding was that the use of hashtags in Kenya is not only in Twitter but also in other SM such as Facebook and WhatsApp as the interviewees claimed. The hashtags are also combined with other genres like memes and gaffes. The hashtags trending on Twitter were at times used in these other platforms. Hashtags were found to be used to circulate memes such as #CanaanMemes, #KDFMemes, and #Kenyans and therefore in these other platforms hashtags are used to qualify memes and clarify context.

The respondents also gave reasons that would make a hashtag not to gain popularity in Twitter. Some of the factors that make people not to respond to hashtags include empty political rhetoric that is meant to sell ideologies of the political class such as bringing change that never happens; hashtags that have monotonous wording; hashtags that are too long; hashtags that are trivial in nature; hashtags that trigger hate or animosity among communities; hashtags that would trigger close monitoring from government authorities; those that have no bearing on the individual respondent's life.

#### **5.2.4 Nature of the Hashtag Discourse and the Formation of Public Opinion**

The forth objective was to investigate the influence of the nature of the hashtag discourse on the formation of public opinion in socio-political issues in Kenya. To understand the nature of hashtag discourse the researcher looked at number of mentions that a hashtag elicited online, trending period of the hashtag, flow of the discourse and the type of responses found in the tweets. The findings revealed that there is a negatively and insignificant relationship between number of mentions and formation of public opinion. This means that the number of mentions a hashtag generates does not provide a moderately fit for predicting public opinion formation. Hashtags with 10,000 mentions gained national influence just as those with 150,000 mentions. The results however revealed that trending period had a significant

influence on public opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya since hashtags had to at least reach a good number of respondents to be said to have national influence.

In relation to the flow of hashtag discourse on Twitter, the research revealed certain characteristics such as negotiation of meaning, overlaps in conversation, inserting of the # symbol before the comment or response, and incoherent sentences. The results also showed that some Twitter users introduced distractors in the conversations like humour, insults, irrelevant information and so on, but the tweets always steered back to topic/main hashtag in the next tweet. Disruptions on turn-taking and turn-adjacency caused by the system posting numerous tweets simultaneously were addressed through the use of the # and @ symbols coupled with intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Turn-taking on Twitter posts was seen to be incoherent but managed through strategies like addressivity, linking and quotations. There was a tendency of irrelevant posts appearing in-between exchanges. This was attributed to the very nature of computer mediated discourse where the system posts what is posted and has no ability to connect participants. This was important in ensuring that participants stick to the topic in the hashtag. All the 35 hashtags revealed these characteristics meaning that the flow of discourse was significant in ensuring that the hashtag achieved its goal of influencing opinion formation on the issue under discussion.

### **5.2.5 Formation of Public Opinion**

The dependent variable in this research was formation of public opinion. The study investigated how the formation of public opinion in Kenya has been influenced by the relatively new phenomenon of KOTs formulating hashtags to discuss issues of national importance on Twitter. The key findings of the research were that opinion formation process takes three routes: the central route that starts with hashtag formation, the peripheral route that involves the online discourse based on the hashtag and finally the behavioral route that involves expression of opinion and action. The other finding was that in expression of opinion through the various

tweets, a respondent would either rely on feeling, reasoning, individual conviction or the collective view of the majority. The findings indicate that how a hashtag appealed to emotions of the respondent (affective response) and how others view the issue being discussed nationally influenced the individual opinion more than the other factors like reasoning (cognitive response) or owning the hashtag idea (central route).

The overall finding of how hashtags influence the formation of public opinion is that framing was the most influential factor, followed by the context in which a hashtag is formed, then the nature of discourse and finally the actors in the hashtag discourse.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

The current study was based on the general area of social media influence specifically online discourse under Twitter hashtags formulated by KOT. The study was guided by two theories, citizen journalism theory and media framing theory. The study undertook a CDA of hashtag conversations on Twitter to investigate the social aspects of the hashtag revolution. Results obtained from a content analysis of data obtained from 35 hashtags were complemented using interviews done on 22 media personalities, 10 KOT's and 4 hashtag developers in line with the objectives of the research. The CDA approach was adopted because the tweets are essentially a form of online discourse referred in this study as computer mediated discourse (CMD) and need to be understood as such.

Empirical evidence of studies done previously on opinion formation through social media use show that social media are highly influential in opinion formation. These studies have mostly been about political mobilization where social media platforms are used as campaign tools. This study sought to find out the role of Twitter hashtags in shaping opinions on everyday social and political issues in Kenya. The research was underpinned by four independent variables: of framing of hashtags, context of hashtag creation, the nature of hashtag discourse and the actors in the sampled hashtags. The term actor was adopted due to the fact that the creators of the hashtag (source) also respond to those hashtags and others created by different people. The

actors are also a combination of persons with different demographic characteristics which may not explicitly be seen online. There are people in different age groups, ordinary citizens, prominent business men and women, politicians, media personalities and the so called celebrities.

Based on the research findings, the study concluded that framing is the most influential factor in determining the formation of public opinion. This concurs with Entman (1993). The language choice of the hash tag and code of the hash tag has a significant effect on public opinion formation. However grammatical structure has no significant effect on public opinion formation. Emphasis frames had more influence than equivalence frames. In addition hashtags formulated in English form a higher public opinion. This is an indicator that hashtags and the use of social media is mostly done by people who have some knowledge of English language. In Kenya this is the educated group referred to as the elite. Uneducated Kenyans would respond more to hashtags in Kiswahili or Sheng.

The study concluded that hash tag actors have a significant relationship with public opinion formation. In addition hashtags formulated by the public form a higher public opinion. Hashtags created by media personalities and independent developers were fewer and therefore were found to be less preferred than those done by ordinary citizens hence less influential on public opinion formation. The study then concludes that source credibility is not as important in hashtag discourse as with other forms of discourse hence disagrees with findings in Kang (2010) that source credibility can boost a message's ability to persuade people to have certain views or opinion. Mainstream media continue to play their role of gatekeeping but there is a paradigm shift in that now citizens are gatewatching and social media including Twitter opens many gates at the same time making it difficult for the media to keep up with citizens. This conclusion concurs with Jensen (2012) and Bruns (2008b).

Hashtag context was found to have a significant relationship with public opinion formation. The context could refer to the co-text (communicative context) or the

situational context that refers to who is talking about what and where. Social media seem to provide an avenue for free expression and for citizens to voice their issues.

The study concluded that number of mentions and formation of public opinion are negative and insignificant. In addition, trending period has a significant influence on public opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya. The study also concluded that volatility of the hash tag had a significant influence on public opinion formation on socio-political issues in Kenya.

The research findings agree with Kaschesky, Sobkowicz and Bouchard (2011) that opinion research aims at identifying emerging trends based on views, dispositions, moods, attitudes and expectations. The hashtags formulated by Kenyans seemed to fit this description. They were formulated to identify problems, diagnose causes, suggest solutions and in some instances call for clearly stated action. Generally, hashtags were seen to provide the democratic space needed by citizens to express opinion and be more actively involved in decision making through citizen journalism.

The study concurs with Entman (1993) in his framing theory's argument that the way a message is framed will have an influence on the opinion formed by the respondent. Most of the respondents prefer short, concise hashtags that address immediate issues in the society. In relation to citizen journalism the study concludes that there is a paradigm shift in the way news is gathered, distributed and consumed by the ordinary citizen in Kenya. The media is increasingly involving the public in debating issues of national interest. News created by Wanjiku through social media topics and discourse is now finding its way in the mainstream media stations. This explains why the stations now have shown that they call *trends or social media* and related programmes to address the active audience. Ordinary citizens are forming hashtags and engaging in participatory communication on issues of national importance. Their opinions are expressed online. The form of citizen journalism exhibited through hashtags is different from the traditional definition of citizen journalism. Citizens are not just allowed to participate on what the media has created but they are creating the

hashtags themselves together with the media and other players like bloggers and commercial hashtag developers. The tagging of media personalities in the posts however is an indicator that the mainstream media is still expected to authenticate the information.

In conclusion, this study has found that the framing, actors, context and the nature of hashtag discourse also influences the opinion formed by the public on the issue under discussion whether it is social or political. The way a text (hashtag) is framed by an actor (the formulator) to explain an issue occurring in a particular social or political context determines if the respondent (also an actor) will begin an exchange online (discourse based on the hashtag). If the texts are about political or social issue regimes and are worded in a catchy emotive manner, chances are that the KOTs will respond to the hashtags through tweets, retweets and mentions and eventually the hashtag will trend and gain national attention. These exchanges take different directions (flow of discourse aka opinion routes) and last different durations of time. A hashtag that is formulated outside the context of emerging issues of national importance rarely gains popularity on Twitter. A hashtag with normal wording and grammar and is not easy to connect with day to day issues affecting the ordinary Kenyan rarely trends. These hashtags cannot be said to give national opinion.

The study also concludes that citizen journalism has taken root in Kenya especially through the Internet. The form of citizen journalism exhibited through formulation and use of hashtags is independent citizen journalism where citizens are creating and disseminating news without the help of journalists. Hashtags formulated by ordinary citizens (Wanjiku) are more popular than those formulated by the media. The media seems to formulate hashtags on breaking news such as tragedies which trend on Twitter. The mainstream media also act as accelerants of the trending hashtags by airing them during the prime time news as trends.

#### **5.4 Research Recommendations**

This section covers the recommendations of the research on further areas of research, the practice of language and communication and finally recommendation on policy.

Overall, the study recommends that Kenyans should continue to use the hash tags to share and shape opinions as they are a popular and powerful genre among media practitioners and citizens. In addition Kenyans on twitter should respond to the hash tags. The study also recommends that the hash tag formulators should look at the relevance of the hash tag before formulating it. In addition hash tag formulators should formulate most hash tags in English and Kiswahili.

On language and communication theory, the study took a multiperspectival approach in the analysis of variables. Two theories were used. The media framing theory and the citizen journalism approach under participatory communication theory. The media framing theory is premised on the argument that the media decides what the audience will watch, read, or listen to (sets the agenda) and decides how the issues selected will be given priority (priming) and how they will be presented in terms of wording and language (framing). This study found that the citizens have basically effected a paradigm shift where this theory is concerned. In creating hashtags that involve issues of national importance citizens are now setting the agenda by deciding what will be discussed online, framing by creating the hashtag itself, priming by deciding when to post the hashtag or tweet, and gatewatching or guarding against filtering and gatekeeping through the whole process. This new phenomenon waters down and neutralize the traditional role of mainstream media in framing agenda setting and priming of news as well as gatekeeping. The media is sometimes overtaken by the public through social media especially during breaking news. The study recommends that the theories of media framing, priming and agenda setting be reviewed in line with the features of Computer Mediated Discourse and Computer Mediated Communication more so in this era of mobile assisted communication.

For the Critical Discourse Approach, there is need to explore the discursive aspect of discourse especially how power relations are portrayed in online interactions. The theory does not give much prominence to discursive resistance using genres of communication as observed in the hashtags. Hashtags were used for discursive resistance by ordinary citizens who seem to resist negative ideologies through text and online talk (tweeting).

There is need to continue exploring the place of citizen journalism as online communication continues and new genres of communication emerge. Further the connection between what is happening offline and how this is presented online. This dialogue and voice in the public sphere in the internet era needs to be studied further.

In relation to the framing of hashtags the study found that the way a hashtag is framed was significantly influential on how popular the hashtag becomes in the public sphere. Therefore the study recommends that media personalities involved with online journalism be educated on linguistic aspects of hashtags during their coursework. Message formulation in colleges is not a major topic of study. It is usually just a hint in a major topic like the communication process. This is despite the fact that many sectors including marketing, political communication and teaching rely so much on how a message is framed. Hashtags are now used for marketing by different organizations and entities. Framing as a topic of study can no longer be ignored. The issue of gate watching and gatekeeping in media practice needs to be investigated afresh especially with the rise of social media sites.

One of the objectives of the study was to investigate how the nature of hashtag discourse influences the public opinion formed in relation to the issue under debate. The study found that this discourse can experience disruptors in its flow. The disruptors will prevent even a hashtag created for a good cause from trending. Audience awareness and audience analysis are important in understanding these responses. The issue of political ideologies dominating the minds of the online respondents whereby politics finds its way into a completely different topic requires one to be keen and steer public debate back to the objective of the hashtag.

The study recommends that those involved in hashtag creation consider the respondents of those hashtags more seriously. Online audience sometimes includes of opinion leaders, who consist of politicians, popular bloggers, comedians and online artists like meme creators. These actors of hashtag discourse can easily popularize or kill a hashtag. Opinion leaders should engage more in hashtag creation since the study has shown that hashtags are opinion shapers and their source is

important. Moreover, hashtags should continue being formulated to expand the democratic space of the public sphere, enhance business and attain political objectives.

In regard to the context of hashtag formation, the study recommends that issue regime analysis be carried out before a hashtag is formulated. The social and political context determines how a hashtag is framed. There is need to balance the issues as most hashtags are political yet there are many more issues that affect the lives of ordinary Kenyans such as disease, conflict in arid areas and poverty related problems. Hashtags do not have to be only about breaking news and tragedies. Awareness of these social problems can be created through hashtags. By creating hashtags the media propagates its traditional role of informer, educator and the public watchdog.

Hashtags are powerful tools and a genre that is quickly emerging as a tool of choice for marketers, activists, politicians and ordinary citizens whenever they need to quickly get attention on an issue. The findings of this research have proved that the ruling class responds to hashtags and sometimes according to the expectations of the public after certain is informed about an issue. The study recommends that policy makers continue to formulate hashtags as a tool of communication giving more attention to the framing of those hashtags as it was found to be the most influential factor.

This study sought to assess the influence of the hashtag revolution on the formation of public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya. On further research are that the study recommends that a similar study should be conducted in other countries for comparison purposes. The study recommends that research on the use of hashtags in other social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram be conducted. The emergence of memes that also employ the use of hashtags should be investigated. One of the findings of the study was that the use of memes and gaffes also gets enjoined with the use of hashtags e.g. #Kari memes and #Mugabe quotes. This interaction was outside the scope of this study. This is a new phenomenon that

needs to be investigated. The research found that hashtags are becoming commercialized and hashtag developers are being hired during campaigns and advertisements. Commercialization of hashtags is also an area that can be studied. The focus would be on the extent to which hashtag developers for hire are in operation.

Another area of interest that was beyond the scope of this study is political economy of the mass media. There is need to find out how much the ruling class has been able to influence the hashtag trends if at all and if there are any political agents who aim at creating hashtags to dissuade public opinion and propagate the ideologies of the ruling class. The area of cyber activism also referred to internet activism can be studied. The study discovered an element of this in the use of hashtags for discursive resistance which can be explored further using hashtags and memes as the communication genres of focus.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix i: List of Hashtags (#)

S N	HASHTAG	TRENDIN G DATE	NATUR E OF ISSUE	SOURCE	CATEGO RY
1	#147IsNotJustANumber	May 1, 2015		OryOkolloh	Commercial Developers
2	#BabaWhileYouWereAway	May 28, 2014		HardleyMalema	Public (Wanjiku)
3	#BungomaJamesBond	May 16, 2016		Wanjiku	Public
4	#DeadBeatKenya	Dec. 22, 2014		Jackson Njeru	Public (Wanjiku)
5	#HotBedofTerror	Jul 23, 2015		Wanjiku	Public
6	#HotBedofApologies	July 28, 2015		Wanjiku	Public
7	#HurumaTragedy	May 2, 2016		Media	Citizen Tv
8	#JehovahWanyonyi	Aug 10, 2016		Wanjiku	Public
9	#KenyansvsZimbabweans	Nov 4, 2015		Wanjiku	Public
10	#ObamaInKenya	Jul 21, 2015		Media	Citizen TV
11	#ObamaHomeComing	Jul 29, 2015		Gilbert Kenya	Public
12	#OchollaMoment	Oct 27, 2015		Media	Citizen TV

<b>13</b>	#ParisAttack	<b>Nov 16, 2015</b>		Media	<b>Public</b>
<b>14</b>	#RIPJacobJuma	<b>May 5, 2016</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>
<b>15</b>	#RoguePastor	<b>Sep 22, 2015</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>
<b>16</b>	#PastorOfImpunity	<b>Aug 2, 2015</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>
<b>17</b>	#SomeoneTellCNN	<b>Jul 27, 2015</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>
<b>18</b>	#SomeoneTellMugabe	<b>15 Nov 2015</b>		Waihiga Mwaura	<b>Media Personality</b>
<b>19</b>	#SomeoneTellNigeria	<b>Mar 21, 2014</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>
<b>20</b>	#TeamMafisi	<b>Nov 1, 2013</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>
<b>21</b>	#ObamaReturns	<b>Jul 25, 2015</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>
<b>22</b>	#UhuruVisitsKenya	<b>Aug 24, 2016</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>
<b>23</b>	#MyPresidentMyChoice	<b>Aug 26, 2015</b>		Commercial Developers	<b>Public (political agent)</b>
<b>24</b>	#MyDressMyChoice	<b>Nov 17, 2014</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>
<b>25</b>	#TeachersStrike			Media	<b>Citizen TV</b>
<b>26</b>	#LipaKamaTender	<b>Dec 23, 2016</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>
<b>27</b>	#DepotRutoPilot	<b>Feb 24, 2016</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>
<b>28</b>	#RapeDoctor	<b>10 Sep</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>

		<b>2015</b>			
<b>29</b>	#EducationCrisis	<b>Oct 9, 2015</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>
<b>30</b>	#IStandWithKDF	<b>Jan 18, 2016</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>
<b>31</b>	#POTUS	<b>July 20, 2015</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>
<b>32</b>	#WaiguruDeals	<b>March 1, 2016</b>		Media	<b>NTV Kenya</b>
<b>34</b>	#Mollis	<b>Nov 2, 2015</b>		Mollis	<b>Public</b>
<b>35</b>	#KenyansTellKagame	<b>Aug 10, 2015</b>		Wanjiku	<b>Public</b>

## **Appendix ii: Transcription Matrix: Hashtag Discourse resilience**

<b>Hashtag</b>	<b>Number of mention</b>	<b>Trending period</b>
1	130,000	1months
2	140,000	2months
3	150,000	3months
4	70,500	2months
5	101,100	1week
6	150,000	3weeks
7	130,000	2weeks
8	140,000	1month
9	150,000	3weeks
10	130,000	1week
11	154,000	2weeks
12	134,000	4weeks
13	151,000	5weeks
14	142,000	2months
15	141,000	1months
16	151,000	1months
17	116,000	1month
18	104,000	3weeks
19	115,000	1week
20	103,000	2weeks
21	105,000	4weeks

22	109,000	1weeks
23	110,000	1months
24	112,000	4months
25	111,000	2months
26	121,000	1month
27	151,000	3weeks
28	125,000	1week
29	140,000	2weeks
30	87,000	4weeks
31	86,000	5weeks
32	80,000	1months
33	10,000	2months
34	90,000	2months
35	115,000	1month
36	122,000	3weeks

### **Appendix iii: Situational Context of Individual Context**

S/N0	HASHTAG	ISSUE	NATURE OF ISSUE
1	#147IsNotJustANumber	Garrissa university terror attack that left a total of 147 people dead. KOTs wanted action taken to secure Kenyans	Insecurity/social
2	#BabaWhileYouWereAway	Opposition leader Raila Odinga had travelled out of the country for almost two months and his followers were trying to show that things go wrong when he is not in the country	Political
3	#BungomaJamesBond	It rose from the comic event of a member of public trying to hang onto a flying helicopter, much like the movie legend James Bond, from where he fell onto the ground injuring himself	Social
4	#DeadBeatKenya	Emanated from a post in SM where women reprimanded men who abscond their fatherly duties leaving the mothers to fend for their children	Social
5	#HotBedOfTerror	A CNN reporter had reported that president Obama was visiting the hot bed of terror (Kenya)	Insecurity
6	#HotBedofApologies	CNN had apologized to Kenyans after the complaints about calling Kenya a hot bed of terror got the Kenyan president's attention (he referred to Kenya as the hot bed of opportunities and cultural diversity) and	Political

		media air time.	
7	#HurumaTragedy	A building had collapsed in Huruma Estate, Nairobi, killing several people and media developed the hashtag to inform public and condemn corruption in the building sector	Social
8	#JehovahWanyonyi	This was about a god living in Western Kenya who had followers who believed he was the supreme god. The hashtag came up when he was said to have died	Social
9	#KenyansVsZimbabweans	President Mugabe of Zimbabwe had allegedly called Kenyans thieves and that God should not have created them	Political
10	#ObamaInKenya	It was about the United States President visit to Kenya that many had seen impossible due to political differences after the ICC case	Political
11	#ObamaHomecoming	This was based on the fact the United States has Kenya routes and so his trip	Political
12	#BroOchollaMoment	A pastor had sent a sexually laced message meant for his lover to a WhatsApp prayer group by mistake making Kenyans create a hashtag to show the hypocrisy among church leaders and followers	Social
13	#StopTheDrunkPresident	This was after a terror attack that left several policemen and civilians dead and thereafter a young girl was raped in Nyeri. In response to	Political/ Insecurity

		complaints from Kenyans on security the president said that security starts with the citizens. This led them to think that the president was out of touch with reality (drunk)	
14	#ParisAttack	This was created by the media after a terror attack in the French capital of Paris. KOTs were tweeting in solidarity with the world as they are also constantly victims of terror	Insecurity
15	#RIPJacobJuma	Jacob Juma was a prominent business man who got attention because he had threatened to reveal secrets on a scandal based on Eurobond trading. He was brutally murdered by unknown people and Kenyans read politics	Political/economic
16	#RoguePastor	A pastor in a protestant church had hit a pedestrian crossing a highway and fled from the scene and later denying involvement	Social
17	#PastorOfImpunity	This came about after a pastor hit a pedestrian and was not prosecuted making citizens think that people with money and social influence were treated as if above the law hence the word impunity	Political
18	#SomeoneTellCNN	It was based on a report that depicted Kenya as an insecure state and a hot bed of terror	Political
19	#SomeoneTellMugabe	Kenyans were reacting to a post in social media claiming that president	Socio-Political

		Mugabe had called Kenyans thieves. It later emerged that it was a fake account	
20	#SomeoneTellNigeria	It was a reaction to news that Kenyan players had been treated poorly in Nigeria by being given substandard accommodation while their players had been given VIP treatment in Nairobi, Kenya.	Social
21	#TeamMafisi	This hashtag was created as a way of expressing the extent and faces of sexual immorality in Kenya	Social
22	#ObamaReturns	This was meant to address the fact that Obama had visited his father's land, Kenya, severally before but was now visiting as a president.	Political
23	#UhuruVisitsKenya	The hashtag was in protest of the many presidential trips that many KOTs thought were too expensive for the state	Political
24	#MyPresidentMyChoice	This was created by a political operative to dissuade the continuous criticism leveled against the president in SM	Political
25	#MyDressMyChoice	A young woman had been stripped by touts in Nairobi's central business district over scanty dressing. Women activists on Twitter coined the hashtag and displayed during demonstrations.	Social
26	#TeachersStrike	Coined by the media to discuss an ongoing teachers strike that happened around national examinations time causing	Social

		panic among Kenyans	
27	#LipaKamaTender	This came up during the doctors strike	Political
28	#DepotRutoPilot	This was developed after the Deputy President's, who happened to be white, harassed and assaulted a female police officer. This was seen as a racist attack and a sign of superiority complex that allowed impunity	Political
29	#EducationCrisis	This hashtag was created by the media to create a public debate towards the teachers strike that would show the magnitude of the matter and its impact on the stakeholders in general	Social
30	#IStandWithKDF	The hashtag was created after several soldiers died in the line of duty in Somalia. KOTs felt that the government was not recognizing their sacrifice and demanded a state organized memorial service for them	Political
31	#POTUS	The hashtag stood for President of the United States. It was a sensitization hashtag prior to the much anticipated Obama visit to Kenya	Political
32	#WaiguruDeals	The hashtag emerged after the NYS looting scandal that translated into the loss of hundreds of millions from the National Youth Service coffers.	Political/economic
33	#Mollis	KOTs created this hashtag after a leaked audio clip went viral. The clip was a conversation between two lovers which was highly	Social

		obscene and the girl seemed harassed sexually.	
34	#RapeDoctor	This was created after a fake doctor who operated a clinic was video-taped raping an unconscious female patient	Social
35	#SomeoneTellKagame	KOTs created the hashtag after the Rwandese president replied to a tweet by a Kenyan who asked him not to ruin his legacy by ruling for life. The president asked him to let Rwanda be and mind Kenyan legacy if there is any	Political

#### **Appendix iv: Socio-political Effects of the Hashtags**

S/NO	HASHTAG	SOCIAL EFFECT
1	#147IsNotJustANumber	Government had to take action by covering burial expenses of the Garrissa university students and hold a memorial service
2	#BabaWhileYouWereAway	Catapulted the opposition leader's popularity. The name Baba is now used by his fans to refer to him. The tag was used to mobilize a huge number of followers in Uhuru park to welcome the leader.
3	#BungomaJamesBond	The man who attempted to hang onto a helicopter was arrested and charged
4	#DeadBeatKenya	The Facebook page was closed after men accused of child neglect complained on defamation and cyber bullying
5	#HotBedOfTerror	CNN had to apologize over this statement to the Kenyan people and government
6	#HotBedOfApologies	This was in response to the apology and it was meant to further humiliate the media house (CNN)
7	#HurumaTragedy	The government had to review documentation of surrounding buildings and demolish those that were not safe
8	#JehovahWanyonyi	The cult was brought to the limelight and its influence in Western Kenya fizzled after featuring on mainstream media
9	#KenyansvsZimbabweans	Diplomatic tiff where the agencies had to act in restoring peace
10	#ObamaInKenya	Sensitization of the Obama visit through discussions on SM
11	#ObamaHomeComing	The world focused on the Obama visit as not just a visit to Africa but to his Father land

12	#OchollaMoment	This has become the term used when people misplace communication
13	#ParisAttack	Sensitization of Kenyans on global terror effects
14	#RIPJacobJuma	This led to investigations being started on the business man's death
15	#RoguePastor	The pastor was arrested due to public outcry and charged in court
16	#PastorOfImpunity	A hashtag meant to press for the arrest of the pastor over an accident involving an ordinary Kenyan woman
17	#SomeoneTellCNN	Led to a diplomatic reaction from the president who referred to Kenya as a hot bed of opportunities. Eventually CNN apologized
18	#SomeoneTellMugabe	President Mugabe's government had to respond to accusations of disrespecting Kenyans by saying the page used to send the messages was fake.
19	#SomeoneTellNigeria	The sports organizers had to respond to Kenyans about mistreatment of players
20	#TeamMafisi	This was purely for entertainment but the term gained ground in the society as one that refers to promiscuous individuals with no morals
21	#ObamaReturns	The hashtag was able to bring about the connection between Obama's current visit as president and his earlier visit as a young man in search of his roots
22	#UhuruVisitsKenya	The government responded by explaining the many visits that the president was making outside the country as meant to create opportunities for Kenya
23	#MyPresidentMyChoice	This hashtag was in response to accusations that the president was acting immorally and had no touch with the ordinary Kenyan's

		state of life especially insecurity. His agents created it to counter the hashtag #StopTheDrunkPresident
24	#MyDressMyChoice	This hashtag led to the arrest of the touts involved in undressing a young woman, after presidential orders
25	#TeachersStrike	Meant to bring to focus the teachers strike. It was created by the media.
26	#LipaKamaTender	A hashtag with a political connotation meant to push the government to pay doctors, the effect was a strike that took a political turn leaving the doctors unheard
27	#DepotRutoPilot	The pilot was arrested and charged for assaulting a woman.
28	#RapeDoctor	The doctor was arrested and charged after the hashtag that created public outrage
29	#EducationCrisis	This hashtag was meant to press the government further to deal with the teachers strike in light of an upcoming exam season.
30	#IStandWithKDF	This led to the government holding a memorial service for fallen soldiers contrary to military practice
31	#POTUS	It was a curious hashtag just before confirmation of Obama visit. It emphasized the status of the American president as a very important person visiting Kenya
32	#WaiguruDeals	A hashtag protesting corruption and impunity. It led to debates that eventually informed the minister's resignation
33	#Mollis	This hashtag was about rape and it led to female activists condemning the act and stopping the playing of the audio clip in which a young girl was being sexually molested
34	#KenyansTellKagame	President Kagame responded to

		Kenyans on Twitter contrary to diplomatic practice
35	#StopTheDrunkPresident	Kenyans were reacting to the president's attitude on insecurity. This elicited a response from State house.

## **Appendix v: Interview Guide for Journalists**

My name is Anne Wangari Munuku, a PhD student at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, and I would like to interview you. The purpose of this interview is to obtain information on the use of hashtags in the media and its influence on opinion formation among Kenyans. The information gathered through this interview is purely for academic purposes and will be treated with utmost confidentiality. It will not be used for any other purpose apart from this research.

1. To what extent do Kenyans use social media?
2. Which in your opinion is the most frequently used social media network as news source by Kenyans among these five?
  - a) Twitter
  - b) Facebook
  - c) Instagram
  - d) WhatsApp
  - e) Others (please specify)
3. On what platform do Kenyans access social media?
4. To what extent are the media practitioners using the Twitter hashtag to interact with viewers in your opinion? Please explain.
5. Does your media house use hashtags?
6. If yes, in which programs are they used? Name specific programs stating if its news, entertainment, educative or general content.
7. How does your station use the #? (choose all that apply)
  - a) Gathering public opinion
  - b) Interacting with audience
  - c) News dissemination
  - d) Polling on current issues
  - e) Getting feedback on news
  - f) Entertainment

8. Does your media house have journalists specifically assigned to social media?
9. If so, are they trained in social media use or digital journalism? Any challenges?
10. In Kenya today, there's a new trend of journalists using the hashtag symbol to identify news topics. What informed this new behaviour in your opinion?
11. How frequently do you as a journalist compose hashtags? Please expound.
12. Do you have any hashtags that your media house generated and were able to get national attentions? Please state them.
13. Are there any factors that journalists consider when coming up with a hashtag? Please state them.
14. What kinds of situations lead to hashtag formation?
15. Do media houses always formulate the hashtags or are there times when the journalists have adopted the hashtags formulated by members of the public? Give examples.
16. In your opinion what factors make a hashtag trend in the media houses and in the public?
17. Do you think that the use of hashtags by media houses has improved news dissemination or interactivity with the audience? Please explain.
18. In what ways have the hashtags affected media houses in their operations?
19. Do you think the hashtags have been able to shape the opinion of the public in social and political issues so far? Please explain.
20. What kind of responses have the trending hashtags been getting from members of the public?
21. Which are some of the hashtags you have formulated and which in your opinion have been successful? Please give details.
22. Which groups of people respond to the hashtags that media practitioners formulate?
23. Are the responses that you get from audience utilized in any way by the media house and/or journalist? Please elaborate.

24. Do you feel like there is a paradigm shift in the traditional of the media especially the production and dissemination of news as well as being the public watchdog? Please expound.

Thank you for your cooperation during this interview

## **Appendix vi: Interview Guide for Public Hashtag Developers**

My name is Anne Wangari Munuku, a PhD student at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, and I would like to interview you. The purpose of this interview is to obtain information on the use of hashtags in the media and its influence on opinion formation among Kenyans. The information gathered through this interview is for academic purposes and will be confidential. It will not be used for any other purpose apart from this research.

### **Questions:**

1. How would you rate the use of social media in Kenya?
  - a) Very high b) High c) Average d) Low e) Very low
2. Which in your opinion is the most frequently used social media network as news source by Kenyans?
  - a) Twitter b) Facebook c) Instagram d) WhatsApp e) Others
3. How do you think most Kenyans access social media sites?
  - a) Mobile phone
  - b) Computers
4. There is a new trend in Kenya, where Kenyans are using social media to discuss issues especially with the use of hashtags? Why do you think this is the case?
5. How are Kenyans using the hashtag in your opinion?
6. Which are some of the hashtags you have formulated and which in your opinion have been successful? Please give details.
7. You have been formulating hashtags. What factors do you consider when framing any hashtag for public use?
8. Do you think it matters who formulates the hashtag as far its popularity rating is concerned?
9. What social or political issues inform the formulation of the hashtags? Please elaborate.
10. What factors in your opinion make a hashtag trend the most?

11. Do media houses or other players like the government ever respond to hashtags formulated by independent bloggers or ordinary citizens? Please explain and if possible give specific instances.
12. To what extent do you feel the hashtags have influenced how people view and respond to political and social issues? Give specific examples.

Thank you for participating in this interview

## **Appendix vii: Interview Guide for Twitter Users/KOTs**

My name is Anne Wangari Munuku, a PhD student at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, and I would like to interview you. The purpose of this interview is to obtain information on the use of hashtags in the media and its influence on opinion formation among Kenyans. The information gathered through this interview is for academic purposes and will be confidential. It will not be used for any other purpose apart from this research.

### **General Information:**

Occupation:

Level of Education:

Age Bracket: a) 20-25 b) 26-35 c) Over 35

### **Interview Questions:**

1. Are you a social media fan? To what extent do you use it?
2. Which in your opinion is the most frequently used social media network as a news source by Kenyans among these?
  - a) Twitter
  - b) Facebook
  - c) Instagram
  - d) WhatsApp
  - e) Others
3. On what platform do Kenyans access social media?
  - a) Phone

b) Computer

- 4.** Do you use hashtags to communicate online?
- 5.** You are on Twitter. Have you ever formulated a hashtag on social media? If so please state the most popular one,
- 6.** If you create hashtags, what factors do you consider when formulating one?
- 7.** What factors make a hashtag trend online and in the media houses in your opinion?
- 8.** What makes you respond to a hashtag?
- 9.** What kind of hashtags do you respond to and why?
- 10.** Do you think it matters who comes up with a hashtag on Twitter? Explain.
- 11.** Do you ever respond to the hashtags formulated by media houses? Examples?
- 12.** Do you think the use of hashtags by media houses has improved news dissemination or inactivity with the audience? Please explain.
- 13.** Now that Kenyans on Twitter have been using hashtags for some time, to what extent do you think hashtags have been able to influence public opinion?
- 14.** What effects have you been able to see from the use of hashtags by Kenyans?

Thank you for participating in this interview



## NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

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**22<sup>nd</sup> December, 2016**

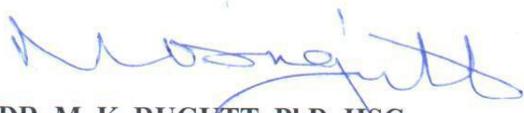
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Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture  
And Technology  
P.O. Box 62000-00200  
**NAIROBI.**

### **RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION**

Following your application for authority to carry out research on "*Influence of the hashtag revolution on the formation of public opinion on socio-political issues in Kenya,*" I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in **Nairobi County** for the period ending **22<sup>nd</sup> December, 2017.**

You are advised to report **the Chief Executive Officers of selected government agencies, the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Nairobi County** before embarking on the research project.

On completion of the research, you are expected to submit **two hard copies and one soft copy in pdf** of the research report/thesis to our office.

  
**DR. M. K. RUGUTT, PhD, HSC.**  
**DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CEO**

Copy to:

The Chief Executive Officers  
Selected Government Agencies

The County Commissioner  
Nairobi County