

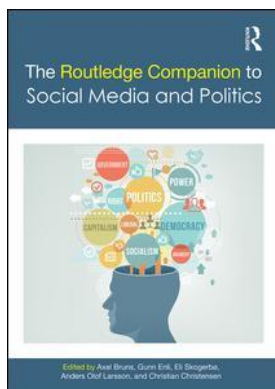
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SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTIONS IN KENYA

Martin Nkosi Ndlela

Introduction

The political communication landscape in Kenya, as in other sub-Saharan African countries, is undergoing tremendous changes due to multifaceted processes of globalisation, particularly the changing stratifications in information and communication technologies. New technologies such as the Internet, mobile telephones, and tablets are inevitably shaping contemporary forms of political communication, be it political campaigns, mobilisation, participation, monitoring, or civic engagement. Social media platforms embedded in these new technologies create complex dynamics to forms of citizen engagement and participation in political processes. Political actors, citizens, and civic organisations in Kenya are increasingly seeking to maximise their political communication by adopting new information and communication technological spaces, including social media platforms. This chapter takes a step towards untangling the implications of social media to elections in Kenya. It explores the inherent potential embedded in social media, and provides illustrative examples on how social media was used or misused during 2013 elections in Kenya. The chapter tackles the question of social media influences on election processes in an emerging and unstable democracy. It also discusses the limitations associated with social media in the Kenyan context.

The Kenyan Political Context: Liberalisation and Democratisation

Literature on the impact of new technology on society, in our case elections, emphasises the importance of contextual and institutional factors in explaining different effects of new technologies in different countries (Karlsen 2010; Anstead and Chadwick 2008; Plasser and Plasser 2002). The impact of new technology is affected by contextual, historical, and cultural factors which vary between campaign environments (Karlsen 2010). Christensen (2011a: 157) also reminds us of the importance of sociopolitical context in any analysis of social media and the importance of maintaining a critical, contextualised perspective on the relation between technology and politics at the local, national, and transnational levels. As such, social media use in elections shape, and are shaped in interplay with, the changing campaigning environment in Kenya.

Social media use in election processes in Kenya should be examined against a backdrop of the country's struggles for democratisation since the wave of democratisation swept across sub-Saharan Africa in the early 1990s. The period witnessed a series of

developments on the African continent suggesting a massive return to liberalised forms of politics (Olukoshi 1998). The wave of democratisation ushered in a new period of governance in Africa, with a number of countries shifting away from authoritarian one-party systems, military dictatorships, or other forms of communist totalitarianism to open systems of governance (Murunga and Nusong'o 2007). The transition period was expected to usher a new system of government characterised by competitive multiparty elections, associated freedoms of association and expression, opening up of political communicative spaces as well as institutional reforms. Kenya officially moved away from a one-party rule and introduced a multiparty system in 1992. It however took another 10 years to remove the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU) and its incumbent leader Daniel arap Moi, who had been in power since 1978. While political liberalisation processes opened up spaces for political pluralism and competitive elections, several obstacles lay in the path of democratisation. Fragmented opposition parties, strong ethnic loyalties, weak institutions of governance, and inadequate media system prevailed. Hence, the transition of power in 2002 from KANU to the opposition alliance, the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC), led by Mwai Kibaki, ushered in a new era in the Kenyan politics, albeit for only a short time. A split in NARC led to the formation of other entities such as NARC–Kenya led by the incumbent President Kibaki and the Orange Democratic Movement, a loose coalition of opposition leaders. Intense competition for power, rivalry between candidates and their supporters, ethnic divide, shifting alliances, and violence have characterised Kenya's electoral processes and its struggles for democracy. As such, elections in Kenya, just as in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa have acquired a reputation for violence (Goldsmith 2014). The violence surrounding the elections raise concerns about how to sustain citizen engagement with elections (Smith 2009).

The 2007 elections were heavily contested, accompanied by physical violence, loss of life, destruction of property, displacement, and gross violation of human rights. The election outcome was disputed on various grounds, including accusations of vote rigging, intimidation of voters, vote buying, or even unfair electoral framework. The post-election violence resulted in over one thousand deaths, and an estimated 500,000 were displaced from their homes. According to the UN High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR 2008), the patterns of violence in 2007 were either a spontaneous reaction to election results, organised attacks against targeted communities, or organised retaliatory attacks. As Sommerville (2011) notes, as the violence escalated the planned and organised nature of the attacks on particular communities became clear. The violence had a strong ethnic dimension, pitting the Kalenjin and Luo supporters of the main opposition leader Raila Odinga against the mainly Kikuyu supporters of the President Kibaki. The interethnic violence which erupted after the disputed elections of 2007 captured the attention of both the international media and human rights organisations, culminating with charges being brought against prominent Kenyan politicians and former rivals, Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto at the International Criminal Court (ICC). As Cheeseman et al. (2014) note, Ruto, then with the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), was singled out for allegedly mobilising anti-Kikuyu attacks at in the Rift Valley, while Kenyatta was alleged to have organised revenge attacks against Odinga's Luo and Kalenjin supporters in Nakuru and Naivasha. The 2013 elections were thus held amidst fears of a return of 2007 violence. However, they turned out to be peaceful, free, and fair, even though the election results were challenged in court. Kenya remains a deeply divided and ethnically polarised country. It has experienced ethnically

driven politics, where issues of ethnicity and linguistic belonging are an overwhelming predictor of voting patterns. The structure of ethnic groups is a formative influence on vote choices (Bratton et al. 2012).

Political Communicative Spaces in Kenya: The Growth of New Media

The mainstream media have played a key role in mediating the Kenyan electoral processes. Kenya has a modern and developed communication system, with pluralism in broadcasting and the print media as well as being an East African hub for international media organisations. However, the Kenyan media system use English as the primary language of communication, with few outlets using local languages. Swahili and other vernacular languages are used mainly in radio stations and some newspapers. The linguistic factor inevitably restricts access to the mass media in Kenya. Other factors, such as the availability of electricity and the coverage of broadcasting signals, have also limited the coverage and consumption of mass media. The Kenyan media ranks fairly well in the freedom of expression index, with journalists enjoying a large measure of freedom in newsgathering and reporting (Reporters Without Borders 2014). The mainstream mass media still maintain an important position in the Kenyan political public sphere. However, the mass media have their limitations in political communication. They tend to be elitists and their messages go through journalistic filtering mechanisms. There is often a time delay between when a message is formulated and when it is actually received by the audiences. The mass media tends to limit the number of public voices and have a predisposition towards one-way forms of communication, where messages flow from politicians to the public via the media.

Social media characteristics affect the political communication process in different ways. First, social media are not elitist driven and provide possibilities for new forms of public participation. Second, messages can be shared with receivers without the aid of intermediaries. Third, there is no time delay in message sharing. Fourth, social media offer possibilities for a multitude of voices. Finally, social media provides opportunities for different directions of informational flow. Social media have various configurations, some of which enable different means of political communication, on a one-to-one or one-to-many basis and in different media platforms. Commenting on the situation in Australia, Bruns and Highfield (2013) observe that commenting on politics now takes place across a multiplatform media ecology, as social media are integrated into mainstream media coverage. The same trend can be noted in Kenya, where social media commentary has at times ended up as articles in the mainstream media and vice versa. The new platforms add new dimensions to political communication by shifting the configurations of power, giving anyone with access the opportunity to create and share content. They offer immediate interactivity in both production, dissemination and consumption of political messages. A simple 'retweet' or 'share' button creates a message spiral in different media platforms.

The last years have seen tremendous growth and uptake of new media in Kenya. According to the report by Apoyo Consultoria (2011), access to voice services has been growing rapidly in recent years due to the development of mobile networks, with four companies providing mobile services in Kenya. Internet Live Stats (2014) show that Kenya has an Internet penetration of 36.7 per cent, with users accessing Internet at home via computer or mobile devices, and the percentage is higher if one includes access to the Internet via workplaces or Internet cafes. A report from the International

Telecommunications Union (ITU; 2014) shows that mobile broadband remains the fastest growing market segment, and it is growing fastest in developing countries. The report also notes that in developing countries mobile-cellular penetration will have reached 90 per cent by the end of 2014. Digital divide is still a major factor in Kenya, where many people do not have access to mainstream media, let alone social media platforms. However, the gap is narrowing especially in the mobile telephone sector.

Kenya has witnessed a substantial increase in the mobile cellular sector, notably an increase in the number of smart phones. All of these statistics point to a rapidly changing social media landscape. While the social media landscape in general is awash with different platforms, those commonly used in Kenya are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and more recently WhatsApp. Even though these platforms have different characteristics, they facilitate political communication and mobilisation, thus enabling shift in the way political information is produced, mediated, and received. Social media are undoubtedly influencing the Kenyan political public sphere by creating new spaces and forms of communication, citizen engagement, and participation in political processes.

Social media are increasingly becoming an important communication tools in the Kenyan political public sphere, facilitating, for example, communication between the politicians and the electorate, as well as allowing users to generate discussions on political issues. Dahlgren (2005) describes a functioning public sphere “as a constellation of communicative spaces in society that permit the circulation of information, ideas, debates—ideally in an unfettered manner—and also the formation of political will” (Dahlgren 2005: 148). Dahlgren also delineates three constitutive dimensions for conceptualising the public sphere, namely the structural, representational and interaction dimension. The structural dimension pertains to formal institutional features, including media organisations. This dimension directs attention to issues such as the political economy of media organisations, ownership structures, control and the legal framework regulated access to the media including associated freedom of expression. The structural dimension also includes issues of inclusion and exclusion in the public sphere. In the representational dimension, Dahlgren (2005) focuses on issues of media output for political communication including fairness, accuracy, plurality of views and agenda setting. According to Dahlgren, the dimension of interaction has to do with citizens’ encounters with the media—a communicative process of making sense, interpreting and using the output, as well as interaction between themselves.

Social media in Kenya arguably reconfigures the issues raised by Dahlgren (2005). It can be argued that social media have implications on the structural, representational and interactional dimensions of the political public sphere by expanding and pluralising communicative spaces. These changes are also noted by Blumler and Gurevitch (2001), who in relation to the Western democracies have noted how the massive growths in media outlets and channels have influenced the traditional systems of political communication. Social media have created a multipublic sphere of political communication. This stratification conforms to Fraser’s (1992) conceptualisation of the public sphere as a multiple-segmented sphere. Keane (2000) also conceptualises the public sphere as multiple and multilevel overlapping public spheres at local, regional, and international levels. The social media increases the plurality of communicative spaces. These spaces facilitating information flows and participation in political issues.

For participants in the political communication process, be it politicians, civic organisations, or citizens, access to social media technologies such as mobile telephones, especially smartphones, is enabling, at least according to the theoretical foundations

behind the *liberation technologies/ technologies of liberation* thesis. As expounded by Diamond (2010: 70):

Liberation technology is any form of information and communication technology (ICT) that can expand political, social, and economic freedom. In the contemporary era, it means essentially the modern, interrelated forms of digital ICT—the computer, the Internet, the mobile phone, and countless innovative applications for them, including “new social media” such as Facebook and Twitter.

As noted by Christensen (2011b), “the liberation technology view is one in which there is a causal relation posited among specific forms of technology, the expansion of rights, and other forms of economic and social development” (Christensen 2011b: 237). The following sections will discuss how different participants in Kenya used social media in the political communication process during the 2013 elections.

The Use of Social Media by Politicians

New technologies are increasingly changing the manner in which politicians communicate with their constituencies, especially for electoral campaigning. As noted above, the expansion of social media is changing the political communicative spaces in Kenya. The successful uses of social media in diverse countries, most notably the U.S. presidential election in 2008 and the claims of social media use in what is now referred to as the Arab Spring in 2011, have prompted politicians in Africa into harnessing new social media tools for political mobilisation processes. As Askanius and Østergaard (2014: 1) observe,

surrounded by the hype and buzzwords such as the ‘Twitter or Facebook revolution’, media and communication technologies have been celebrated as vehicles for rapid political mobilization and alleged to have made a considerable impact on political life, agency and the public sphere.

The hype of social media use in elections is also becoming a visible component of political campaigning and mobilisation in African countries, as “politicians and political groups have quickly realised the potential of social networking sites as campaign tools” (Borah 2014: 201). With the increasing accessibility of smart phones and mobile Internet, new communicative spaces have emerged and politicians are eager to tap the opportunities provided by new technologies. Kenyan political parties and candidates are harnessing the social media platforms as tools for canvassing votes, promoting their ideas. In the Kenyan general elections in 2013, several political positions were contested for—president, senators, county governors, and members of parliament. As noted above, the key contenders in the 2013 elections were the Jubilee Coalition, led by presidential candidate Uhuru Kenyatta with his running mate Samuel Ruto, and the CORD coalition (Coalition for Reforms and Democracy), led by Raila Odinga with his running mate Kalonzo Musyoka.

Politicians across the political divide adopted different strategies in their utilisation of social media tools. The social media strategies for campaigning range from carefully planned usages to simply maintaining a presence. These strategies differ according to

the type of social media used and the attributes of the social media platform used. Odinga (2013) observes that during the 2013 presidential elections in Kenya, “some parties emphasized on the participatory aspects of new technologies in communicating with voters and monitoring of public opinion, whilst others focused on the possibility of a top-down information dissemination” (Odinga 2013: 18). In another study, Wasswa (2013) notes that the 2013 presidential candidates in Kenya integrated social media into their campaigns, using the platforms mainly for sharing information on campaign activities, debates on issues, the sharing of photos, videos and links, updating their followers, soliciting funds, and countering propaganda.

While both coalitions tried to harness the existing social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter on the campaign trail, this chapter provides examples of social media use by politicians linked to the Jubilee Coalition. For their enthusiasm in using social media presidential candidate, Uhuru Kenyatta and his Jubilee Coalition team were referred to as ‘digital’. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Scribd were integrated in the 2013 campaign trail. Within the Facebook platform, Uhuru Kenyatta adopted different strategies such as profiling non-governmental organisations linked to him and pages dedicated to individual profile. The Facebook profile UHURU Kenyatta 2013 (founded in January 2013) is premised along non-government organisation lines and not individual candidate Uhuru Kenyatta or his coalition. The page is registered as a non-government organisation, focusing on engaging, empowering, and celebrating Kenyan young people. It seeks to empower youth for life and nation building. The community was used as one of the campaign platform for the Jubilee Coalition of Uhuru Kenyatta and Samuel Ruto. The campaign messages are simply and subtly and written predominantly in English. The messages focus on a developmental and social change premises.

In another Facebook profile, Uhuru Kenyatta is aimed at individual branding (as of September 2014 the profile had over 1.2 million ‘likes’). The profile provides details about the ‘individual’—his educational background, relationship status, life events, religious inclinations and other individual attributes. This profile provides links to a personal website (www.uhuru.co.ke), which provides other possibilities for being connected, getting involved through participating in events, hosting events, or simply volunteering. The election campaigns methods used in the Uhuru Kenyatta Facebook profile exploit visual imagery accompanied by simple textual messages, providing information on the location of events or thanking the participants to previous meetings and events. Photo imageries, showing huge crowds attending rallies addressed by Uhuru Kenyatta and Jubilee Coalition leaders or representing key segments of the electorate, such as the youth, elderly, chiefs, farmers, other ethnic minority groups, immigrant communities are used extensively. The diversity is clearly intended to reinforce the popularity of the presidential candidate Uhuru Kenyatta and his Jubilee Coalition across the geographical and cultural breadth of Kenya. The candidate and his coalition are presented as inclusive and representative of the Kenyan society.

The Facebook profile also incorporates Uhuru Kenyatta TV: a collection of election campaign video clips posted to YouTube. These clips include campaign speeches from Uhuru Kenyatta and key candidates from his coalition. The coalition’s manifesto, campaign launch and other speeches by the Jubilee Coalition leaders are published in the Uhuru Kenyatta TV. Other videos in the collection address policy issues in the areas of education, agriculture, health, sports and arts. Some videos portray the Jubilee coalition as a transformation force, or the ‘digital team,’ as they referred to themselves.

Another social media platform used by the Kenyan politicians during the 2013 elections is Twitter. Even before the 2013 elections, some Kenyan politicians were amongst the top Twitter users in Africa (Smith 2012). In its Africa network series, *The Guardian* (UK edition) observed that with more and more voters online, leaders are turning to Twitter to get their political message across (Smith 2012). The main presidential candidate in the 2013 elections, Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga are amongst Africa's top 10 tweeting politicians. The *Sahan Journal* also notes that,

as Twitter usage continues to expand in Africa, presidents and politicians in the continent are leveraging the unique power of the micro-blogging site to disseminate their political agendas, instantly communicate with a vast majority of people, recruit citizens to help in their campaigns, and create a space for dialogue and participatory. (*Sahan Journal* 2013: para. 1)

The *Sahan Journal* also notes that Uhuru Kenyatta gained more than 76,000 Twitter followers between January 1 and 31 March 2013 (at the height of the elections). His deputy, Samuel Ruto, was also an avid tweeter during the elections.

An analysis of the social media profiles of key Kenyan politicians such as Uhuru Kenyatta, Raila Odinga, William Ruto, and Musalia Mudavadi show that social media were in various ways incorporated into the overall political campaigning, for dissemination messages or simply informing on past and forthcoming events. It can be concluded that social media are increasingly becoming an important component of the Kenyan political public sphere. Every election time triggers an exponential growth in the use of different media platforms for galvanising votes, organising events through social media, interacting with opinion influencers and engagement with key political issues or simply using online platforms to support offline campaign activities.

It is however important to mention that social media are not replacing traditional forms of campaigning, which in Kenya are still dominated by face-to-face platforms such as public meetings or rallies organised by the parties. Some sections of voters in Kenya, as in other parts of Africa, value predominantly oral communication, mediated through television, radio or face-to-face. Political rallies are used to bridge the linguistic barriers. As noted by Odinga (2013), a large percentage of Kenyans do not understand the country's two official languages, English and Swahili. For parliamentary and local elections, the face-to-face interactions are mainstream modes of campaigning, especially to voters in rural and peri-urban areas.

Political Engagement—Citizens and Social Media Use

To those citizens with access to the Internet, social media have made possible access to alternative communicative spaces 'relatively free' from political and professional mainstream media domination. Several uses of social media can be deciphered in connection with the elections, such as election monitoring, interaction with politicians, and conversations on politics. For voters in Kenya, the conduct of elections and its outcomes has always been a site of contention. Allegations of election rigging, manipulation of votes have undermined the credibility and fairness of the elections in Kenya. As Cheeseman et al. (2014) observe, "the months leading up to the Kenyan elections of March 2013 there was much concern—both within Kenya itself and internationally—that political competition would trigger a fresh wave of violence" (Cheeseman et al.

2014: 2). Memories of the 2007 elections were still fresh and the political atmosphere tense. New media technologies, especially social media offered Kenyans unique opportunities for monitoring the conduct of elections. As Diamond (2010: 70) writes,

liberation technology enables citizens to report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation, and expand the horizon of freedom.

The decentralised nature of social media applications, including the cheaper variants of text messaging via mobile telephone, when deployed properly, can cover vast geographic areas, and facilitate election monitoring. The 2013 elections, therefore, saw the deployment of different tools, including social media, to the monitoring of electoral conduct in the form of crowdsourcing. Crowdsourcing is defined as “an online, distributed problem-solving and production model that leverages the collective intelligence of online communities to serve specific organizational goals” (Brabham 2013: xix). The term itself can be applied to a range of activities where services, ideas and contributions are solicited from other people sharing the same cause. The crowdsourcing approach enables very localised and relevant information to be collected. One example of such crowdsourcing tool is the Ushahidi (n.d.; Swahili word for ‘witness’ or ‘testimony’) platform, which was launched in Kenya in 2008 to enable Kenyans to report and map incidents of violence via SMS or the Web. The motivations behind the Ushahidi lies in the disconnection between what the media and official were reporting and other eyewitness accounts. As one of the core-founders of Ushahidi vividly pointed out in her blog, “we believe that the number of deaths being reported by the government, police, and media is grossly underreported. We also don’t think we have a true picture of what is really going on” (Kenyan Pundit n.d.: para. 7). The Ushahidi platform was meant to enable everyone on the ground to report on election conduct via SMS messages or submit a report via the Web. The Ushahidi platform offered opportunities to citizens to play a greater role in election coverage and monitoring, penetrating even those areas where journalists had limited access. Crowdsourcing through platforms like Ushahidi indicate the growing possibilities of social media. These citizen-centered initiatives sought to empower the electorate, and compel government institutions to be more transparent, open and accountable. The watchdog role often associated with mainstream journalism was thus extended to social media platforms, where ordinary citizens (witnesses) could act as citizen journalists.

Other examples of crowdsourcing involved individuals setting up, for example, Facebook pages dedicated to sharing experiences and witness accounts on election conduct. During the 2013 elections, Facebook communities like Elections Iwitness Kenya (n.d.) were established with the sole objective of sharing information and knowledge about elections. The community encourages the participants to “give your recollections on the elections, what you saw and heard that was wrongfully or intentionally done to bar free and fair elections. For example bribery, multiple ballot papers given to one person, doctored documents (results), etc.” (Elections Iwitness Kenya n.d., section ‘About’, para. 1). Another Facebook community of the Elections Kenya official fanpage, whose stated mission was to bring ‘sanity in elections, education and stopping tribalism’. Facebook group Kenya Elections 2013 describes itself a group of concerned global citizens whose main objective is to inform, debate and get in step with the unfolding of the national election.

Social media were used by groups in Kenya, to gather and share election information, and to provide commentary on the freeness and fairness of the electoral processes. Diamond (2010) argues that digital cameras combined with sites such as YouTube create new possibilities for exposing and challenging abuses of power. For example, incidents of violence during the 2007–2008 elections were captured on mobile cameras and later uploaded to YouTube, thereby generating public attention. As noted by Marchant (2013), when applied to election monitoring, crowdsourcing has the potential to foster citizen engagement with the information—to dispute, confirm or acknowledge its existence, and, thus, has the potential to contribute to empowerment and participation in electoral processes (Marchant 2013:13). Other uses of social media by citizens include general interactions with politicians. These interactions are expressed through various forms such as ‘retweets’, ‘following’, ‘likes’, and ‘commentary’ on social media postings by politicians.

Limitations of Social Media in Elections

Social media have heralded new communicative spaces for political engagement in Kenya. The number of politicians and citizens using social media for election purposes is continually increasing. However, there are some limitations in terms of both access to and application of the new communicative spaces. The social media’s participative function in the Kenya political public sphere is arguably hampered by issues of accessibility, both in terms of the availability of prerequisite technologies and related costs. Limited access to social media affects the plurality and diversity of views in the social media arena. It should be noted however that the presence of a few opinion leaders in the social media arena have some a potential of influencing offline interactions.

Another limitation pertains to the abuse of social media for spreading hate speech and inciting violence. Evidence from the 2007 election violence in Kenya show that social media were used by politicians and individuals to incite violence. Several groups in civil society expressed concern that the violence surrounding the 2007 elections had some parallels with the genocide in Rwanda in the early 1990s, when politicians used media to incite hatred and violence against specific ethnic groups and communities. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR 2008) fact-finding mission, after the 2007 election violence, identified hate speech as an area of concern. It recommended the establishment of a regulatory framework against hate-speech (OHCHR 2008). The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), established after the 2007 post-election crisis, was mandated to develop guidelines for media houses on hate speech. Hate speech is covered by the National Cohesion and Integration Act of 2008. Specifically, Section 62 (1) stipulates that any person who utters words intended to incite feelings of contempt, hatred, hostility, violence or discrimination against any person, group or community on the basis of ethnicity or race, commits an offence. The electoral violence during and after the 2007 led to the development of various strategies and tools for monitoring hate speech, particularly in the electronic media, including social media. One initiative for monitoring hate speech in social media, is the Umati project run by the iHub, an innovation hub for the technology community in Kenya. Umati emerged also out of the concern that mobile and digital technologies have played a central role in the 2007–2008 post-election violence.

Conclusion

Any new communication technology has the potential of changing political communication patterns and structures, thereby changing the public sphere, its contents and participants. In Kenya, social media are increasingly becoming important for politicians and citizens alike. As noted in this chapter, politicians in Kenya have begun experimenting with social media platforms, notably Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as campaign tools during elections. These platforms have been used for mobilising supporters, organising rallies and meetings, reporting on past events, and communication with supporters. They have also been used for individual or party profiling, illustrating the diversity of support base through powerful visual imageries. Self-promotion or praising their coalition partners also features in the social media texts.

Another dimension of social media use during elections pertains to monitoring the conduct of politicians during elections, as individuals and civil society organisations share the burden of reporting abuses, violent acts, corruption cases and other vices likely to diminish the integrity of the elections or, in the worst case scenario, lead to a repeat of the 2007–2008 post-election violence. The use of social media for election monitoring purposes is a vivid example of the changing power constellations in the Kenyan political public sphere. Used appropriately, social media platforms have an empowering and 'liberating' potential. The range of possibilities extends beyond the capabilities and limitations of mainstream media in developing societies such as Kenya.

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