

# Social Media and Governance: Appropriation and Modalities of Use in Kakamega County Governance in Kenya

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**Abstract:** Continuous communication to citizens is significant in any government. Therefore, employing social media as a communication tool in accessing public opinion is imperative. The two tiers of government in Kenya- central and county are progressively incorporating social media. To determine the efficacy and use of social media, there is a need to examine how it is used at the grassroots. This study looked at how the County Government of Kakamega in Kenya is using social media to enhance governance based on the factors informing appropriation of social media and modalities of use of social media in governance. A mixed-methods approach, using the convergent parallel mixed-method research design was utilized. The target population was 34 participants in charge of the communication units at the County. The study concluded that Facebook was the overriding social media platform for enhancing governance and that social media use in governance is ineffective in the Kakamega county government. The study recommends that the county government should train more personnel on social media and digital marketing tools to enhance the usage of social media to disseminate information to the residents. It is hoped that the findings of this research will benefit scholarship as social media is still a new sensation, especially at the grassroots, and there is a significant gap on what it can and cannot do in relation to governance.

**Key terms:** Social media; Governance; appropriation; Modalities; Grassroots

## I. BACKGROUND

Today, the world encounters significant challenges in promoting governance, democracy, transparency, press freedom, and economic development. According to Liu (2017), good governance is essential for a nation's long-term and sustainable development. Social media, as an important information source, plays a crucial role in shaping a healthy democracy and bolstering good governance. According to Oginni & Moitui (2015), the policy-making process and effective governance require quality input, feedback mechanisms, and timely communication of decisions. Social media may act as a catalyst for processes of organizational innovation related to how public authorities exercise power and deliver services (Bergquist et al., 2017). They further note that much of the power of social media comes from the simple fact that media can tell people things that they would not otherwise know and informs people about government actions and decisions, one purpose of public opinion is to inform public policymaking. Accordingly, this study will investigate

how social media is used and its effectiveness in Kakamega County governance to disseminate information to the residents up to the grassroots levels.

The importance of social media use in governance has been emphasized by a number of scholars in the field of communication and governance. Also, the internet and social media contains vast amounts of unexploited possibilities about the kind of politics possible and how politics should be practised (Smith, 2017). Smith (2017) argues that the internet allows for greater public engagement in politics. In addition, online space presents an extra liberal political realm as it is not guarded by the traditional barriers of physical time and space. Hence, this study will determine levels of public participation in Kakamega County Government affairs. Numerous studies have been conducted to assess whether online political participation can be an adequate substitute for offline engagement (Kersting, 2016).

Therefore, the emergence of the internet and social media platforms has made it possible and easier for people from different parts to share their opinions. Television and Radio were the high points of communicative connection in the twentieth century (Oginni & Moitui, 2015). This has since changed as perceived by Mossberger et al. (2013) and Shark (2010b), many governments have been intentional in providing e-government services and implementing social media. Robin Cook, a former UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, suggested that for digital technology to be effectively used in governance, governments should consider defining e-democracy in their agendas (Smith, 2017). Cook asserted that the internet and its component social media empowers the public to react more speedily to government discussion and correspondingly makes it apparent to the public whether the government is keen to react to the opinions conveyed by the public (Smith, 2017). Oginni & Moitui (2015) reasons that the adoption of social media tools in policymaking impacts governance, given that agenda-setting is individually led instead of being group-led, as was the case over the years.

Gladwell 2010 argues that social activism has incredibly been invented by social media. Social media allows politicians and citizens to communicate directly (Pffsch et al., 2013). It allows communication not only be between sender and

receiver but also among several receivers who can also communicate to the sender; hence, three-dimension communication (Hoffman, 2011). For example, Barack Obama incorporated social media and digital marketing strategies in his political communication mechanisms in 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns (Coombs et al. 2015).

Moreover, the Obama administration previously used social media to discuss issues of interest to the young adult population like healthcare, lowering loan interest rates, funding higher education and the Iraq war (Bronstein, 2012). Additionally, Obama restored a sense of community that had long been lost through social media engagement (Harris, 2011). In the United States today, public contribution through social media platforms has helped set the agenda for the newly elected Biden administration (Burki, 2021). With a majority of the public raising concerns over the decision of President Trump to exit the Paris Agreement, for example, the administration has embarked on evaluating ways of contributing to climate change by reducing the rate of greenhouse emissions (Gostin et al., 2021). Agenda setting through social media has similarly sensitized Democrats in the US Parliament who control both legislative houses to determine the policy requirements to prioritize (Gostin et al., 2021).

Another example is the 2007 Australian elections, opposition leader Kevin Rudd adopted effective digital media strategies, including social networks, to run his campaigns (Bertot, Jaeger & Hansen, 2012). The approach revolutionized the political environment, and Rudd won based on interactive technology. Citizens can get organized, informed, and mobilize themselves in social media for different courses. Besides, digital tools and social media have had a profound impact on the advancement of democratic change; hence, the locution Twitter revolution (Morozov, 2011). Some of the revolutions include Iranian elections protests (2009-2010), Disapproval against falsified voting in Moldova (2009), and the termination of totalitarian governments in Tunisia (2010-2011) and Egypt (2011) (Morozov, 2011).

Social media create new forms of activism, improving social impact. For example, Storck (2011) contends that social media is an outlet and alternative press for citizen journalism. Conclusively, (Smith, 2017) posits that social media offers new opportunities that revive citizen's interest in politics. The communicative influence of the internet offers prospects for citizens to contribute in political developments (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

In Africa, social media has been used to express outrage over xenophobic attacks against Africans residing in South Africa and protest the Nigerian government's failure to guarantee security for students learning across vulnerable environments in the northern part of the nation (Ansongu & Odhiambo, 2019). Digitalization of operations in Kenya in various departments started a long time ago though the current government has enhanced it in order to communicate programs to the public (Kamau, 2017). The Central and

County governments in Kenya have also embraced the implementation of social media in governance. Social media presence has increased across multiple parts of Kenya because of internet connectivity across both urban and rural centers (Ndiege, 2019). Additionally, Kamwaria et al. (2015) affirm that politicians are not left behind as government establishments engage citizens across social media.

During the 2013 general elections, all presidential candidates had Facebook and Twitter profiles to engage voters (Kamwaria et al., 2015). The same applied to those vying for gubernatorial, senatorial seats, as well as county assemblies members who similarly intensified their campaigns (Kamwaria et al., 2015). Consequently, the level of citizen participation was enhanced given that they were able to interact with their preferred candidates while equally convincing the neutral voters to join their camps (Ndlela & Mulwo, 2017). The duo further opines that expert groups and government officials use traditional media and public hearings to obtain approval from the relevant stakeholders. Ouma & Adesina (2019) therefore, contend the adoption of social media platforms offers governments the potential to disseminate information through diverse online channels while further soliciting input from the public.

Data from the KNBS (2019) indicates rapid implementation of social media has increased the platforms utilized in Kenya. Ndiege (2019) presents that the citizens employ social media tools to frame their demands strategically and mobilize resources and support around the frames. Moreover, the county residents use social media to generate new ideologies that challenge the position held by their leaders (Nyabola, 2018) As such, the administration of Kakamega County has to occasionally contend with mobilization of resources.

As observed by Nyabola (2018), social media in Kenya is a space where informative and insightful conversations take place. She adds that platforms such as Twitter have been useful in pushing great agendas and the discourse continues offline.

In Kenya, just as in many other parts of the developing world, there is not enough data on societal use of social media. Policymakers in Kenya struggle to design and implement policies that allow users to harness social media's positive effects. There are many areas around social media use that are subject to research (Charles, 2014). Therefore, this study was important in order to scrutinize social media consumption trends among citizens to determine their implication to social, political, and economic institutions in the country.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted convergent parallel mixed method research design where the researcher collected data at the same time, analyzed independently the two components and the information integrated in the interpretation of the overall results together as suggested by Creswell (2014). The study was conducted in Kakamega county in Kenya which has

twelve sub-counties namely; Butere, Ikolomani, Khwisero, Likuyani, Lugari, Lurambi, Matungu, Mumias East, Mumias West, Navakholo, Malava and Shinyalu. The respondents were purposively selected who involved officers from the communication unit at the County level and the Sub-county levels in Kakamega County forming a sample of 33 participants. A questionnaire and an interview guide were employed to generate data.

### III. RESULTS

From the data collected, the following are the results.

#### *Appropriation of Social Media Use in Governance in Kakamega County*

This study sought to establish factors that inform appropriation of social media in governance in Kakamega county in Kenya. The subthemes examined here include: the most preferred social media platform, rating of social media platforms, number of social media platforms and determinants of social media platform use.

#### *Most Preferred Social Media Platform*

The study sought to finding out the media platform that is mostly preferred and used by the respondents in Kakamega county government. Respondents were asked to choose between Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok, Blogs and any other platform that the respondents mostly use. The findings were represented in table 1.

Table 1: Most Preferred Social Media Platform

	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	22	66.7
Twitter	2	6.1
Instagram	2	6.1
YouTube	4	12.1
Blogs	0	6.1
Snapchat	1	3.0
TikTok	2	0.0

According to findings in Table 1, it was noted that majority of the respondents 22(66.7%) preferred Facebook over other platforms while 4(12.1%) of the respondents preferred YouTube over other media platforms. Further, 2(6.1%) of the respondents preferred Twitter, Instagram and TikTok respectively. 1(3.0%) of the respondents preferred Snapchat

over other media platforms. Finally, there was no respondent who preferred Blogs over other social media platform. From the findings in Table 4.2, it can be concluded that Facebook is the most preferred social media platform compared to other platforms in Kakamega county governance.

The results from the questionnaire are similar to those from the interview where it was established that Facebook was the most preferred mode of information dissemination to the residents. It was also noted that as much as there are traces of twitter being used, its use is still picking. Other platforms that were mentioned having an impact on governance included YouTube and the county government website. The lack of training on courses such as social media and digital marketing as already mentioned might have a bearing on the minimal usage of some media platforms than the others.

The findings of this study tally with those of a study by Graham and Avery (2013) who assessed the use of social media by public administrators in U.S and established that Facebook is the main tool for communicating with the public through social media in local governments as indicated by 91% respondents.

#### *Number of Social Media Platforms*

In the appropriation of social media platforms, the researcher endeared to establish the number of social media platforms that the County government of Kakamega has and use daily basis. The findings from respondents were represented in the Table 2.

Table 2: The Number of Social Media Platforms

	Frequency	Percent
One	2	6.1
Two	5	15.2
More than two	26	78.8

According the findings in Table 2, majority of the respondents 26(78.8%) use more than two social media platforms. However, 5(15.2%) of the respondents said they only use two social media platforms within the county. 2(6.1%) of the respondents use only one social media platform.

#### *Determinants of Social Media Use within Kakamega County Government*

Lastly under this objective, the study sought to finding out the determinants of social media use in the county government of Kakamega and the findings were represented in Table 3.

Table 3: Determinants of Social Media Use within Kakamega County Government

		SA	A	UD	D	SD	M	STD. dev
I choose social media platform based on the relevance of information available on the platform	F	18	9	2	3	1	4.2121	1.11124
	%	54.5	27.3	6.1	9.1	3.0		
My choice of social media platform is determined by the health and amount of content that is available	F	14	10	3	4	2	3.9091	1.25906
	%	42.4	30.3	9.1	12.1	6.1		
I choose social media due to the volume of contents on the platforms	F	15	8	4	4	2	3.9091	1.28364
	%	45.5	24.2	12.1	12.1	6.1		
My choice of social media platform is based on user generated contents	F	12	10	4	6	1	3.7879	1.21854
	%	36.4	30.3	12.1	18.2	3.0		
I choose social media platform based on my own timing	F	9	12	3	6	3	3.5455	1.32502
	%	27.3	36.4	9.1	18.2	9.1		
I chose my social media based on my social standings in the society.	F	11	6	1	12	3	3.3030	1.48923
	%	33.3	18.2	3.0	36.4	9.1		
My social media usage is determined by the targeted audience	F	11	9	3	8	2	3.5758	1.34699
	%	33.3	27.3	9.1	24.2	6.1		
My social media usage is determined by personal factors	F	6	6	4	12	5	2.8788	1.38649
	%	18.2	18.2	12.1	36.4	15.2		

SA-Strongly agree, A-Agree, UD-Undecided, D-Disagree \$ SD-Strongly agree

n=33

M-Mean

STD. dev- Standard deviation

According to the findings in Table 3, 27(81.8%) of the respondents agreed and 4(12.1%) of the respondents disagreed that they choose social media platform based on the relevance of information available on the platform. The study findings showed in terms of means and standard deviation that they choose social media platform based on the relevant of information available on the platform (Mean, =4.2121, Standard Deviation=1.11124).

Also 24(72.7%) of the respondents agreed and 6(18.2%) of the respondents disagreed that their choice of social media platform is determined by the health and amount of content that is available. The study findings showed in terms of means and standard deviation that their choice of social media platform is determined by the health and amount of content that is available (Mean, =3.9091, Standard Deviation=1.25906).

On top of that, 23(69.7%) of the respondents agreed and 6(18.2%) of the respondents disagreed that they choose social media due to the volume of contents on the platforms. The study findings showed in terms of means and standard deviation that they choose social media due to the volume of contents on the platforms (Mean, =3.9091, Standard Deviation=1.25906).

Furthermore, 22(66.7%) of the respondents agreed and 7(30.3%) disagreed that their choice of social media platform is based on user generated contents. The study findings showed in terms of means and standard deviation that their choice of social media platform is based on user generated contents. (Mean, =3.7879, Standard Deviation=1.21854).

Also, 21(63.7%) of the respondents agreed and 9(21.2%) of the respondents disagreed that they choose social media platform based on their own timing. The study findings showed in terms of means and standard deviation that they choose social media platform based on their own timing (Mean, =3.5455, Standard Deviation=1.32502).

Further, 17(51.5%) of the respondents agreed and 15(45.5%) of the respondents disagreed that they choose my social media based on their social standings in the society. The study findings showed in terms of means and standard deviation that they choose my social media based on their social standings in the society. (Mean, =3.3030, Standard Deviation=1.48923).

Further, 20(60.6%) of the respondents agreed and 10(30.3%) of the respondents disagreed that their social media usage is determined by the targeted audience. The study findings showed in terms of means and standard deviation that their social media usage is determined by the targeted audience. (Mean, =3.5758, Standard Deviation=1.34699).

Finally, 12(36.4) of the respondents agreed and 17(51.5%) of the respondents disagreed that their social media usage is determined by personal factors. The study findings showed in terms of means and standard deviation that their social media usage is determined by personal factors. (Mean, =2.8788, Standard Deviation=1.38649).

Through the interview, it was established that social media platforms are chosen based on the relevance of information available on the platform and other factors as discussed above form the findings from the questionnaire. However, it was clearly pointed out that the most crucial factor that determines the choice of social media platform was the target audience. This finding is quite dissimilar to what the majority of the participants believe because from the questionnaire, many believe that they choose a platform based on relevance of information available on the platform.

*Modalities of Use of Social Media in Governance in Kakamega County*

The second objective of the study aimed at examining the modalities of use for social media in Kakamega County Government in Kenya. This was examined basing on the modalities the county uses for social media, monitoring or measurement of social media performance and measures put in place to ensure continued operation of social media by the County government.

*General modalities of use of social media in Governance in Kakamega County*

Basing on this sub-theme, the findings were as shown in table 4.

Table 4: Modalities of Social Media Use

	Frequency	Percent
Material modality which involves physical interface of the media.	6	18.2
Sensorial modality to evoke emotions of the audience to enable the county connect with them.	10	30.3
Spatiotemporal modality.	6	18.2
Semiotic modality which involves packaging of the message before it is disseminated to members of the public.	10	30.3

From Table 4, majority of the respondents 10(30.3%) use sensorial modality to evoke emotions of the audience to enable the county connect with them. Also, 10(30.3%) use Semiotic modality which involves packaging of the message before it is disseminated to members of the public. Further, 6(18.2%) of the respondents use material modality which involves physical interface of the media. Finally, 6(18.2%) of the respondents use spatiotemporal modality.

It was established through the interview that the county communication team majorly depends on public participation where the members of the county assembly are used as agents before the information about the county is deliberated on and disseminated. The subcounty administrators, ward administrators, community area administrators and

community counsel are drivers of the information to be disseminated about the county government.

*Monitoring of Social Media Performance*

The study aimed at establishing the monitoring and measurement of social media performance in governance in Kakamega County. The results are indicated in table 5.

Table 5: Monitoring and Measurement of Social Media Performance

		YES	NO
Does your office use its social media tools to provide information about county government activities or policies to citizens?	Frequency	26	7
	Percentage	78.8	21.2
Does your office use social media to motivate citizens to become more engaged in local government?	Frequency	28	5
	Percentage	84.8	15.2
Does your office either formally or informally monitor or measure its social media performance?	Frequency	10	23
	Percentage	30.3	69.7
Did or does your organization actively publicize its social media tools to citizens?	Frequency	27	6
	Percentage	81.8	18.2

According to Table 5, it was noted that 26(78.8%) of the respondents agreed and 7(21.2%) of the respondents disagreed that their office use its social media tools to provide information about county government activities or policies to citizens. The findings showed that their office use its social media tools to provide information about county government activities or policies to citizens. Also, 28(84.8%) of the respondents agreed and 5(15.2%) disagreed that their office use social media to motivate citizens to become more engaged in local government.

On top of that, it was noted that 10(30.3%) of the respondents agreed and 23(69.7%) disagreed that their office either formally or informally monitor or measure its social media performance. Finally, 27(81.8%) of the respondents agreed and 6(18.2%) disagreed that their organization actively publicize its social media tools to citizens.

Through the interview, it was also noted that there is constant monitoring of the use of social media in governance to check on the usage statistics.

*Measures Put in Place to Ensure Continued Operation of Office's Social Media Platforms*

The study also sought to find out the measures put in place to ensure continued operation of office's social media, among this measures were, staff-related, financial resources, training or skilled development, technology related and other measures. The findings are showed in Table 6.

Table 6: Measures Put in Place to Ensure Continued Operation of social Media platforms

	Staff-related	Financial resources	Training or skills development	Technology-related
Frequency	7	6	8	12
Percent	21.2	18.2	24.2	36.4

According to table 6, it was noted that, majority of the respondents 12(36.4%) use technology related measures to ensure continued operation of their office social media, also, 8(24.2%) of the respondents use training or skills development to ensure continued operation. Further, 7(21.2%) of the respondents use staff related to ensure continued operation of their office social media. Finally, 6(18.2%) of the respondents use financial resources to fix their social media to ensure continued operation of their social media.

Specifically, the head of the communication unit through the interview noted that the prevalent measures in place to enhance social media usage include educating people on social media use as there is low usage according to the county communication unit statistics. Further, the office is starting to livestream on the development activities in order to help reach out to the people and educate them on the county developments.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study concluded that Facebook was the most dominant social media platform of enhancing governance and its choice was based on relevance of information available on the platform and the target audience. Further, Sensorial and semiotic modalities are the most widely used to enhance social media connection between the county government and the residents. In addition, social media use in governance is constantly checked in order to enhance efficiency.

#### V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the county government should train more personnel on social media digital marketing in order to enhance usage of social media to disseminate information to the residents. The county government should also expand the platforms to reach more people. This will also enable the staff to use a variety of social media platforms instead of relying on Facebook alone mainly thus enhancing governance.

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