# CULTURAL IDENTITY AND NEW

# COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES:

# POLITICAL, ETHNIC AND IDEOLOGICAL

# IMPLICATIONS

**Editor**

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Chapter Two

## Identity and the New Communication Technologies; Evidence from Kenya

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This chapter discusses the use of short text messages on cell phones and e-mail conversations among social networks to negotiate identities in Kenya. It shows that these New Communication Technologies have revolutionised the way of doing things in Kenya including politics. It comes out that Old Communication Technologies are being complemented by the new technologies which are now taking over and which can be used to negotiate both narrow ethnic-blocks and national identities. The paper shows that the new technology is not always used to portray and perpetuate narrow ethnic identities; rather instances exist when the users want to project professional and national identities. Supported with data that focus on the pre- and post-2007 elections, the chapter argues that inasmuch as the New Communication Technologies are good, great caution should be exercised when using them since unchecked use might bring untold suffering to society.

### 1. Introduction

The present chapter discusses the use of New Communication Technologies (NCTs) in negotiating and perpetuating various identities in Kenya. New Communication Technologies include computers, mobile phones, facsimile and the Internet. The NCTs are distinguished from Old Communication Technologies (OCTs) that comprise radio, television and newspapers which are also referred to as the old media (Danmole 2010).

The paper focuses on the Internet and mobile phones (cell phones) for communication. Jensen (2001, p.98) has described the Internet as a product of the

ICTs while Crystal (2006, p.3) views the Internet as "an association of computer networks with common standards which enable messages to be sent from any registered computer (or *host*) on one network to any host or any other". The Internet developed experimentally in the United States of America in the 1960s as a network which grew fast to include the military, federal, regional, university, business and personal users and is now the world's largest network (ibid). The Internet provides many services and enables many people to be in touch through electronic mail (e-mail), chart groups, virtual worlds, World Wide Web, instant messaging, blogging, etc. It is notable that more than a quarter of the world's population was using the Internet in 2009 whereby over a quarter of the world's population or 1.9 billion people had access to a computer at home (ITU, 2009). On the other hand, according to ITU (2009), the cell phone is the most rapidly adopted technology in history. It is the most popular and widespread personal technology in the world with an estimated 4.6 billion mobile broadband subscribers globally as of 2009 having overtaken the fixed broadband subscribers in 2008.

As already indicated, the present chapter focuses on the role of the Internet and the cell phone in negotiating identities. The New Communication Technologies vide mobile telephony and Internet services are presently widely available in Kenya so that sending short text messages (SMS) and e-mails is fashionable. The prevalence of mobile phones is a product of the liberalization and privatization of the telecommunications sector since the late 1990s when competition in the mobile telephone market came into being (Chepkonga 2002). Subsequently, mobile broadband subscribers increased from 15,000 in 1999 to 17.4 million by mid 2009 (RoK, 2009) through the four authorised mobile operators, namely Safaricom, Zain, Econet Wireless, and Telkom. During the same period, the number of cyber cafes also increased. Thus surfing the Internet to exchange e-mails and also to read and make comments on social networks appears to be widely in use among those who are computer literate. Internet has also gradually moved away from cyber cafes to mobile phones which have advanced facilities that allow one to surf the World Wide Web. Portable modems are also sold by mobile telecom companies and are ensuring that 'last mile' connectivity is achieved (Ratemo 2010).

As we discuss the role of NCTs, it should be noted that the NCTs are channels of communicating messages of different kinds including messages on individual or group identities using language which includes lexical choices. It is the lexical choices that the users make vide the NCTs that carry the message(s) which project(s) the identity(ies) of the sender(s)-receiver(s). Falling from this, the present chapter's argument is that identities in Kenya, just like elsewhere in the world, are dynamic; that is, they are negotiated and the process of negotiation is reflected in the way that language is used. Therefore, one can identify various identities such as those reflecting peer-groups, professionals and members of different ethnicities and political parties especially in line with claims of Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory. Closely related to Gumperz's (1982) categorization of 'we" and 'they' codes, the social identity theory distinguishes between in-group and out-group members whereby members of either group positively evaluate themselves vis-à-vis the other. Furthermore, in the context of the present chapter, the groups can be private individual(s), i.e. members of particular ethnic groups or impersonal bodies such as political parties, professional groups, etc. Thus the language uses done through the NCTs can be analyzed to yield the various identities some of which we have already mentioned. This chapter particularly seeks to unravel whether or not messages sent through the NCTs reflect identity(ies) that are deeply-seated and ones that usually start from ethnic ideological hegemony.

There are 42 or so ethnic communities in Kenya and it is possible to conservatively talk about over 40 ethnic identities. Furthermore, since the introduction of plural democracy in the country in the early 1990s, ethnicity seems to have entrenched itself in the country's politics. In this case, political parties are usually formed, financed and sustained by drawing their main support from certain regional turfs on the basis of ethnic identification. Whereas the pattern of political parties' formation has almost always been influenced by ethnicity, the trend seems to have been enhanced with the advent of New Communication Technologies. Against this backdrop, we interrogate and demonstrate how the short text messages through cell phones, on the one hand, and the group or social networks on the Internet, on the other hand, are used to negotiate and perpetuate the identities.

Therefore, we ask: What is identity in Kenya? Can one talk of a national identity? Do members of various ethnic groups in Kenya identify themselves as individual ethnic groups? Are there times and occasions when these people assume a national identity? How do they do it? Apart from ethnic identity, what other identities are seen

in Kenya? Subsequently, is it possible to talk of multiple identities in Kenya? Do these identities manifest themselves in political life and political affiliations of Kenyans? How are these identities communicated amongst group members? What is it that New Communication Technologies have added to the communication of identities? What kinds of messages are sent and what identities do they convey? To what extent do the messages conveyed through the New Communication Technologies help to reinforce ethnicity or nationalism in Kenya? We attempt to answer the foregoing questions in a bid to show how mobile phones and the Internet have been used for negotiating identities in Kenya. We also assess whether New Communication Technologies are always used to communicate messages that help to reinforce patterns that are ethnically compliant or whether the messages also do the opposite of this.

The chapter is organised as follows. In section 2, we review views from the existing literature on New Communication Technologies, ethnicity and identity. Section 3 sketches the theoretical framework on which the arguments are based. This is followed in 4 by a description of the methodology we used to gather the data and analyses them. Finally, we offer our concluding remarks in 5.

## 2. Background

As indicated in the foregoing section, two major categories of communication technologies exist, namely the Old Communication Technologies (OCTs) and the New Communication Technologies (NCTs). The distinction is based on the advances made in the field over the years and there appears to be fears that accompany the advent of any new communication technology (Crystal, 2006). For instance, the invention of printing in the 15th century was resisted by the Church that saw it as a satanic invention while the arrival of the telegraph was deemed a destroyer of the family institution and a promoter of crime. Later on, the invention of the telephone was seen as likely to undermine society while broadcasting was feared as a likely voice of propaganda.

In spite of these, the fears were overcome by the technological advancements. For example, the radio, though an OCT, has proved useful in generally disseminating information for development (e.g. Mwansoko, 1995; Makunja, 1995; Saleh & Kasisa, 1995; Rukiramakuba, 1995; Mpiranya, 1995). But it is also true that language use in

radio has been instrumental in spreading and even "killing" the grammar of Kiswahili in Kenya (Mohochi, 2001) through incorrect use of the language. Mohochi (ibid) further contends that the preponderance of linguistic errors in both print and electronic media fails to not only promote Kiswahili but also passes wrong messages. Therefore, since the various types of old media are crucial in communicating to a wide audience, it is imperative that the media carefully consider their choice of language. Concerning identity, Mohochi claims that errors arising from mother tongue influence, especially on radio and TV, are grave since they expose the anchors' ethnic identities. To avoid this ethnic "betrayal" during the broadcasting, Said (2007) cautions media proprietors against using only paper certificates to hire anchors while ignoring their practical oral use of language. To him, it is possible to conceal ethnic identities in the media if careful and rigorous measures are put in place during the hiring process. The danger of exposing and foregrounding ethnic identity can also be reflected if possession of good translation skills is not emphasized during the hiring process (Bitugi, 2007). Unless one is well grounded in communication and translation skills, there is a danger of one's cultural background seeping through the translation that s/he does in a media house given that translation is a routine practice in the media industry.

Elsewhere, it has been shown that radio is an effective "weapon" in the fight against the enemies of development, namely, disease, ignorance and poverty in Kenya since it is cheap to purchase, service and use even in the most remote corners of the country (Ogechi, in press). In addition, it requires little or no literacy at all to operate. The radio has been used for edutainment in the communication of messages on family planning and the HIV/Aids pandemic in Kenya since the 1990s (Njogu, 2001). The FM radio stations are especially effective when they broadcast content on local issues and in local languages that listeners identify with (Kembo-Sure & Ogechi, 2006) as seen through the case of *Mang'eleta FM Radio* in Makueni District of Eastern Province which broadcasts from Makueni town and serves a small radius. Such local FM radio stations play a critical role not only in development issues but also in passing peace and reconciliation messages (Kawoya & Makokha, 2009; Ogechi & Sang, in press). Although the history of FM radio stations in Kenya only goes back to the freeing of airwaves in the early 1990s (Musau, 2000; Orao 2009),

Kawoya & Makokha (2009, p. 22) sum up the profound effect of these stations as follows:

> Today, FM stations, whether privately or state-sponsored, command large audiences with their customized programmes on news, entertainment, consumerism and especially political commentary. They have given voice to the masses in two ways. Firstly, in the spirit of free-market economic principle of demand and supply, the people have a greater say in the format, timing and even language of broadcasting. Failure to adhere to consumer tastes normally renders a radio station marginal and unpopular in the competitive field. Secondly, popular call-in interactive programmes such as the "People's Parliament" and the *"ebimeeza"* (interactive roundtable/call-in radio discussions) ensure greater engagement of the masses in topical and political issues affecting their localities and countries.

Besides radio, newspapers and magazines as forms of OCTs have been exploited in passing general messages of development and particularly messages on HIV/AIDs. Beck (2006), for example, explored the efficacy of HIV/AIDS communication or prevention campaigns through the Kiswahili comic in *Kingo* magazine and a UNICEF-ESARO sponsored comic *Sara* initiative in Kiswahili. The choice of Kiswahili medium was found to be very effective in the campaigns. Similarly, regional newspapers printed in Kiswahili under the sponsorship of the UNESCO were particularly useful in enhancing rural development when they existed in the 1980s (Luganda 2001). Indeed, newspapers have been central in identity and Kenyan politics in the way they choose their words in order to portray a liking and support or otherwise to politicians or political parties (Matu 2009, p.38). Van Dijk (1997) cited in Matu (2009, p. 38) has argued that lexical items may be selected not only because of the official criteria of decorum, but also because they effectively emphasize or de-emphasize political attitudes and opinions, garner support, manipulate public opinion, manufacture consent or legitimate political power. This lexical choice was seen in the Kenyan newspapers in the run-up to the 1997 general elections where individual politicians and political parties were disparagingly reported in the press. Skewed lexical choice was also used to enhance negative ethnicity and cause mayhem as happened in the run up to and after the disputed presidential elections of 2007.

It is also notable that at present the OCTs do not solely operate as they did in the past; rather there is convergence of the OCTs and NCTs. The call-in interactive programmes in radios mentioned by Kawoya & Makokha (ibid) reflect the convergence; in addition, journalists now make use of the Internet in their daily work (Reglitz, 2009). This development has both positive and negative ramifications (Danmole, 2010). Positively, the NCTs have assisted people to learn more about issues they are not knowledgeable in while negatively they have made it possible for people to read newspapers online or send text messages that could aggravate conflict as it happened among the Muslims in Nigeria who supported Ayatollah

Khomeini's *fatwa* of a death sentence on Salman Rushdie following his publication of a book that was deemed offensive to Islam (Danmole, Ibid).

The NCTs and especially the Internet's distributed nature and the relatively low cost of digital production has made it a site of multiplicity and diversity since the mid-1990s (Wei & Kolko 2005, p.200). Many people spend many minutes and hours on the Internet and even do so as the first thing in the morning. The *Daily Nation* Tuesday June 1, 2010 reported of a Kenyan fiction writer who received news of her having been short listed for the 2010 Caine Prize for African Writing thus:

> There was this e-mail from her, on a Friday morning late April, with the subject: "some good news from *Wasafiri*". I opened it while still in bed. My eyes blinked and my mind went into a spin. I remember thinking – this is one reason, Lily, why you should never ever log into your e-mail before taking a shower and drinking two mugs of strong tea to shepherd your brains into the real world.

In addition to e-mail usage craze, the computers and cell phones are now widely used by social networks such as face book and twitter. No wonder Hintereder (2009, p.3) in an editorial has said:

> .... shame on you. After all everyone in this network and app page is always on the move and always online – day and night, of course. The brave new media world has also pretty unashamedly thrown the established theories of communication studies abroad, radically expanded old transmitter-receiver patterns, created a new and boundless cosmos of communicative freedom, brought to life new channels, new content and new formats.

Besides Internet on computers and mobile telephones, computer mediated communication extends to mobile phones in the form of short text services (Ondimu, 2006) (SMS) that cell phone owners send to each other with a profound effect on language choice and use. Posteguillo (2003) pioneered linguistic studies of SMS through his Netlinguistics Analytical Framework (NAF) whereby he focused on language analysis as used in the Internet. He concurred with Crystal (2006) that SMS is affecting language use and forms whereby increasingly new forms of spelling and shorthand-like characters are used. As further revealed in Ondimu's (2006) inquiry, the new linguistic forms used in the text messages, can be viewed as a new language variety complete with own lexicon, grammar, discourse and usage conditions. Indeed no single code is used in the SMS texts she studied. Instead a mixture of surface morphemes from different stable and unstable codes was seen. Elsewhere, however, single codes have been used on SMS as a New Communication Technology for seeking and getting information in the provision of

health, business and agricultural services to grassroots people in Kenya (Bosire 2010) in order to achieve enhanced development and alleviate poverty. Such SMS texts are auto responses to information seekers from the said departments. To the best of our knowledge, no studies have explored NCTs and the negotiation of identities. In addition, we have not come across works on whether or not the NCTs have been used to negotiate identities to perpetuate ethnic hegemonies, issues that this chapter examines.

Though we have already alluded to the term "identity", we now wish to discuss it in some depth. The term "identity" can be defined variously depending upon one's professional or academic background. In general, however, identity has something to do with the way people are categorized (identified) either by themselves and/or by others along a variety of dimensions, namely, race, nationality, ethnicity, culture, sex and gender (Ogechi, 2008, p. 76). Of all cultural elements, language is a powerful instrument of identity (and belonging). Kramsch (2001, p. 65) argues that:

> It is widely believed that there is a natural connection between the language spoken by members of a social group and that group's identity. By their accent, their vocabulary, their discourse patterns, speakers identify themselves and are identified as members of this or that speech and discourse community.

But identity is not as easily defined vide language as such. It can be complex in heterogeneous linguistic communities and hybrid identities do exist (Maganda, 2006). Moreover, identities are not static but dynamic since they can be negotiated even when language is used to mark identity. For instance, while Gumperz (1982) talked of two identities in multilingual communities namely, "we" and "they" code identities, Kamwangamalu (1998) extended this to argue for a "code-in-between". The essence here was to provide for identities that are neutral even when a 'we-code' is for in-group solidarity while a 'they-code' is for distinguishing the out-group members. Therefore, the case of Kenya that is treated in this chapter is bound to present a complex scenario of identities – there exist 42 or so languages with English as the official language while Kiswahili is the national and co-official language. Heavy codeswitching involving these languages and the mother tongues including Sheng[1] do exist. This is not only seen in interaction on politics but also

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[1] An unstable code spoken in Kenya, previously attributed to the youth.

among professionals and peers vide New Communication Technologies. To understand how political discourse could display different ethnic identities, we discuss the term "ethnicity" and its role in the formation of political parties in Kenya.

The terms "ethnicity" and "ethnic group" are variously interpreted depending on one's discipline or political leaning. According to Jackson (1984), in Becher & Basedau (2008, p.6), ethnicity can be viewed as "embracing all kinds of socially attributed identities such as clan, community, ethnicity, faith (religion), gender, language, regional provenance, race, sect or tribe, and the like, all of which are the result of self-ascription by others but are usually inherited by birth and cannot easily be hanged by an act of individual will". This view is slightly different from sociolinguists who claim that ethnicity is "a set of descent based on cultural identifiers used to associate persons to social groupings that expand and contract in inverse relation to the scale of inclusiveness of membership" (Cohen, 1978, p.387). In spite of the little differences between the various disciplines, in this chapter, an ethnic group is distinguished from another by use of a common language, shared culture and descent from a common ancestry.

Based on language as an ethnic distinctive feature, Kenya is said to have 42 or so ethnic groups (Ntabo & Ogechi, 2009) divided into Bantu, Nilotic and Cushitic groups. Numerically, Bantus comprising Gusii, Gikuyu, Swahili, Kamba etc, are 60% followed by Nilotes (e.g. Kalenjin, Luo and Maasai) and Cushites (such as Somali and Rendile) in that order. Formation of political parties has always been influenced by the coalition of different but like-minded ethnic groups (Elischer, 2008). As an illustration, in the run up to the national referendum on the proposed constitution in 2005, two groups emerged leading to the formation of the major competing political parties in the 2007 elections. There was the so-called Orange Group that opposed the proposed constitution. To a large extent, this group gravitated around the Luo, Kalenjin and Luhya. The group that supported the constitution namely, the Banana Group, was largely supported by the Gikuyu, Meru and Somali. Members of the other ethnic groups spread out their support in these two camps. Statements made by either group's politicians during the campaigns for the 2005 referendum used belittling, demeaning or derogatory terms towards the ethnic groups in the opposite side of the campaigns:

**Context:** Statement by a member of parliament supporting YES in relation to those in the NO camp.

1. They hate Kikuyus because we are hardworking. Luos just go fishing and fish is free and thereafter they ask the government for relief maize to make ugali. (KNCHR & KHRC 2006: 39)

**Context:** Statement by a member of parliament opposed to the then proposed constitution in relation those in the YES camp.

2. If YES wins, the Kikuyus should pack their bags and move out of Eldama Ravine. Kikuyus from Shauri, Maji Mazuri and Timboroa will not be issued with Title Deeds if they vote YES (KNCHR & KHRC 2006: 41)

These statements indicate that the relationship that was building up then was based on ethnicity. After the national referendum (November 2005), the two groups were transformed into political parties. The Orange Group was initially registered as the Orange Democratic Party of Kenya (ODM-K). However, about three months to the election date, it split into two, that is, ODM-K and Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). During the split, some members of the Orange Group (largely those in KANU[2]) joined the Banana Group that became the Party of National Unity (PNU). This group was associated with the then government, which started off as a NARC government on 30th December 2002. The three groups went into the national elections with distinct slogans that identified them and were widely used in their campaign messages. While PNU's slogan was *Kazi lendelee!* (let work continue, i.e. let the existing government continue ruling), ODM-K waved greetings in the air while shoutng *Wiper!*. The ODM's slogan was *Kazi lanze!* (let work begin!). These slogans were a major identity marker and in most cases they were associated with the party leaders and, by extension and remotely, the ethnic groups of the party leaders. Note that the identification was not that of individual ethnic groups but a collective of ethnicities associated with the group and later associated with a political party.

This chapter analyses SMS texts and internet messages to show how NCTs have been useful in enhancing collective identities. The data will illustrate political identities and political party stereotypes, on the one hand, and national identity,

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[2] KANU refers to Kenya African National Union Party. This is the party that ruled Kenya from independence in 1963 until December 2002 when it was defeated by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). Some members of the ODM-K were influential politicians during the hay days of KANU.

peace and reconciliation on the other. The e-mails analyzed reflect Kenyans identifying themselves as practitioners of a specific profession regardless of their ethnicity. Before we present our data, we wish to describe the theoretical framework on which the data were analysed.

### 3. Social identity theory

The data were analyzed on the basis of the social identity theory that is a construct of social psychology initially propounded by Tajfel (1978) and subsequently refined by his associates' studies. Two of the theory's tenets, namely categorization processes (Tajfel, 1978) and the ultimate attribution error (Pettigrew, 1979) are crucial to this chapter. On one hand, Tajfel (1978) claims that there exist categorization processes whereby individuals distinguish between in-group (read same ethnic or professional group) and out-group (read another ethnic or professional group) members. On the other hand, Turner (1987) argues that group behaviour is the behaviour of individuals acting on the basis of categorizing self and others as a social group. That is, behaviour of individuals within a group could reflect or represent the group. A central claim here is that individuals strive to achieve and/or maintain a positive social identity. In this case, there is negative evaluation of members of the out-group contrary to the positive evaluation of the in-group by members of the in-group. Negative evaluation results when there is emphasis and foregrounding of the differences between the in-group and out-group. For instance, by members of an ethnic group (in-group) stressing ethnic stereotypes about members of other ethnic groups (out-group), negative statements are likely to occur.

On the contrary, Pettigrew (1979 in Vrij, Van Schie & Cherryman, 1996), also a proponent of the social identity theory, asserts that the ultimate attribution error could yield both positive and negative assessment. The error refers to people's tendency to attribute (a) the positive behaviour of out-group members and the negative behaviour of in-group members to situational factors (external attribution) and (b) to attribute the negative behaviour of out-group members and the positive behaviour of in-group members to the member's personal dispositions (internal attribution). This argument could work well among members of a shared academic discipline and profession regardless of their ethnicity. That is, members view colleagues in the same profession who hail from another ethnic group positively and not negatively.

They view them as comrades and not outsiders. The categorization into in-group-out-group alongside the attribution error was applied in the analysis of data for identity negotiation vide the SMS and e-mail messages in this chapter.

## 4. The data and analyses

### 4.1 The data

The data were collected between January and February 2010. The SMS comprised those that were sent out during campaigns in the run up to the 2007 general elections and soon after the eruption of post election violence in early 2008. The origin of the campaign SMS texts was anonymous but they could reach peoples' cell phones and circulate among people who knew each other. The circulation could be taken as part of the campaign or as a way of getting amusement from the messages. We requested our research assistant, a fourth year student at the university where we work, to ask her fellow students to forward to her cell phone the political SMS texts they received in the run up to the 2007 elections. Where they had deleted the texts, she requested the students to reconstruct them both in terms of content and even wording as much as they could recall. Other SMS texts were obtained from a colleague at Moi University who hosted a peace programme on *Biblia Husema Studios Radio* when the post-election violence was subsiding, whereby listeners were requested to send text messages to express their feelings about the post-election violence and what they felt should be the way forward.

As for the e-mail texts, we used data sent to our mail inboxes from networks of our professions. In particular, we used those messages circulating among former information science students at Moi University (one of this chapter's authors is an in-group member of the Infoscience Yahoogroup).

Before we collected the SMS, we assured our respondents that the data will be used strictly for academic purposes and that their identities will be concealed. With this assurance, the students volunteered to give the SMS or even reconstruct the SMS messages they had received during the 2007 election campaigns. We gave similar assurance to our email correspondents before we analyzed the data that we received.

The data were not always in one code; rather they were more often designed in a mixed code involving English, Kiswahili and Sheng lexemes. In the analysis, English lexemes are presented in normal font, Kiswahili words are in **bold** while Sheng words are in ***bold italics*** face. We tried to contextually situate the examples before subjecting them to the claims of the social identity theory upon which the analyses are premised.

### 4.2 Portrayal of ethnicity and stereotypes

A number of the SMS messages sent out during the 2007 election campaigns reflected negative ethnicity and skewed stereotypes of the supposed supporters and members of other parties while emphasizing solidarity among the in-group. As indicated earlier, it was very easy and possible to send out texts due to new developments concerning this New Communication Technology. The essence of the text messages sent out was to negatively portray out-group members (those of the rival political party) while glorifying the in-group members:

**Context:** The practice of conducting campaigns by different political parties.

3. While ODM men are already out of bed campaigning PNU men are still telling their women "**panua! kazi iendelee**" as ODM-K women are telling their men "**niko** wet **nipatie** wiper".

'While ODM politicians leave bed early to go out campaigning, PNU male politicians keep asking their female compatriots for more sex as do ODM-K male politicians whose ready-for-sex women ask for clothing to wipe their wet genitals'.

**Context:** Warning about the ODM presidential candidate.

4. Remember ODM means One Dangerous Man; One Deceased Man.

The foregoing two examples illustrate a revolutionised 2007 election in Kenya where New Communication Technologies were in use during election campaigns. There is no gainsaying the fact that the technology had the advantage of reaching many people at the same time compared to the use of public address systems at campaign rallies or using the Old Communication Technology through radio. In addition, unlike the old technology where it is not possible for a message to be retained for further consumption and possible spread at a later time to a potential voter, the SMS could be stored in the phone and forwarded to another potential voter's cell phone.

However, the messages create long lasting negative evaluation of the rivals. Example (3) was most likely crafted by ODM supporters. As indicated earlier, the ethnic bedrock of ODM comprised the Luo, Kalenjin and Luhya while PNU's ethnic turf was the Kikuyu, Meru and Embu. ODM-K's ethnic following was largely Kamba. Therefore, (3) seems to be using the New Communication Technology to, first, negotiate ODM identity and solidarity and, secondly, negatively evaluate the ethnic groups that supported PNU and ODM-K as lazy sex maniacs who care little about achieving political power. They are portrayed as being leisure lovers compared to their ODM counterparts who are early risers and hardworking go-getters.

It should not be construed that it is only ODM that spewed negativities about their rivals. As (4) shows, even ODM's rivals were equally negative about ODM. While the acronym ODM refers to the Orange Democratic Movement, the supporters of ODM's rivals sought to portray the leader of ODM negatively as a dangerous person that should not be trusted with national leadership. They even misinterpreted the acronym to portray him as a sickly person knowing fully well that the constitution of Kenya does not allow a person that is medically unfit to lead. If stretched further, one can say that the negative portrayal of the ODM leader was not just meant to refer to him as an individual; rather his ODM-leaning ethnic groups were being portrayed as dangerous and sickly to lead. Such an SMS was meant to enhance existing stereotypes about the behaviour of ethnic groups by their out-group members.

The SMS texts analysed so far are those that were sent out during campaigns. It is clear that their focus was in negotiating identities of competing political parties and, by extension, either perceived positive or negative attributes of their leaders or the stereotypes attributed to the political party leader's ethnic group. Besides such SMS texts, there were those that were sent out as the post-election violence raged on in early 2008. These too were sent out by the two major opposing political groups and some of them were replete with veiled ethnic vitriol as seen in (5) and (6).

**Context:** Counting of votes and release of presidential results

5. When ODM votes were trickling in, Peter Marangi was seen painting State House orange but as soon as PNU votes started coming in Marangi was called to undo the mess.

**Context:** Reaction of some voters to the release of presidential results

6. PNU **ponyaka na ugali**, ODM **okoa dunia maisha ianse**[3] **na** Pentagon; K***** **ni mwizi ashindwe!!!**
'PNU has run away with maize bread, ODM should save the world and life starts afresh with the Pentagon since K***** is a thief'.

The SMS text in (5) refers to the state of things as tallying and announcement of presidential votes was being done. Initially, the ODM presidential candidate was seen to have scored a win since votes from his ethnic bedrock were announced giving him a handsome lead. However, tables turned against him as votes from the PNU ethnic strongholds trickled in. It is also instructive to note that during the electioneering period a television advert by a paint manufacturing company was running using a model with a pseudonym, Peter Marangi, who came on to television screens painting walls. Thus in (5), by Peter Marangi painting the presidential residence (state house) orange (the official colour of the ODM) it signified an initial ODM "win". This win was however a "mess", according to the SMS writer, since it was nullified with the arrival of winning votes for the PNU candidate. The SMS must have been crafted by the PNU supporters to taunt and laugh at their ODM rivals for prematurely celebrating yet their candidate had not won an election.

What is pleasing is that the PNU SMS was merely taunting and not overtly hulling negative ethnicity contrary to (6). The SMS must have been sent out by an enraged ODM supporter who thought the ODM candidate had been robbed off his victory by PNU - PNU **ponyaka na ugali** (PNU has run away with food). S/he was pleading for good life to start afresh with the ODM team in power as seen through the statement - ODM **okoa dunia maisha ianse na** Pentagon (ODM save the situation and let life start afresh). The ODM Pentagon comprised of five ODM luminaries from different ethnic groups that spearheaded the national presidential campaign for the ODM leader. Example (6) illustrates the SMS writer's hurt feelings and expectations so that s/he even exaggerates her negative attribution of the PNU whose presidential

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[3] This is *ianze* (it starts) in Standard Kiswahili. But the writer has a mother tongue influence that is reflected also in writing.

candidate s/he calls a thief (**mwizi**) probably implying that the candidate rigged himself into office.

To demonstrate that identity is dynamic and is negotiated from time, there were SMS texts that struck a reconciliatory tone. (7) was sent out after the post-election violence when many internally displaced persons (IDP) were living in make shift camps:

**Context:** A male writer talks of his predicament after the outbreak of post-poll violence.

7. **Watoto wetu na wamama manaumia juu ya ODM na PNU na si' 'nanyeshewa na hata hakuna nyu'ba tena tunaishi kwa hema na makaratasi[4].**
'Our children and women are suffering because of ODM and PNU. They are being rained on and we have no houses since we live in tents and paper thatched houses'.

This is one of those examples that were collected from one of the presenters of a peace and reconciliation radio programme on *Biblia Husema Studios*. As mentioned earlier, the presenters invited people in the radio's North Rift catchment area to send SMS texts to express their feelings and what they thought was the solution to the crisis. Example 7 seems to be a disappointment from the internally displaced persons (IDPs). You could have expected him to blame the crisis on the leaders of a rival political party and the ethnic group to which that party's leader belonged. However, here we see a person that is striking a middle ground and blames both political parties for occasioning a crisis through their competition. With such a message, it is not possible to argue that new communication technologies are always used to enhance ethnic hegemonic identities. Rather, it appears that they can be used when talking about political issues to negotiate a semblance of a national identity.

## Negotiating profession-based identity

Groups of professionals who have studied the same discipline have also been seen to use New Communication Technologies to negotiate and sustain their identity

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[4] The statement is a reflection of mother tongue influence on Kiswahili.

regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. While the foregoing section showed how the cell phone is useful, this section draws from the Internet to demonstrate profession-based identity. With the advent of the Internet, different groups of people have established networks through which they keep touch on research developments and queries in their disciplines. For example, scholars who study codeswitching interact through the codeswitching group network. Similarly scholars whose studies were funded by a certain foundation usually keep in touch through an electronic network as do the German trained scholars funded by the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (DAAD – the German Academic Exchange Service). Heavy use of the Internet is due to a changed environment concerning the New Communication Technologies in Kenya. It is notable that until the end of the 1990s, Internet services were uncommon and a preserve of a minority elite-computer-literate group in urban areas while cell phones were only for the high level state operatives plus their business collaborators and wheeler-dealers. The state had a monopoly over the provision of telecommunication services including phones and the Internet. The few Internet cafes that existed then were only in urban centres with power supply; Internet surfing was slow and very far out of the reach of the common man. However, from the late 1990s the state was forced to privatise the provision of mobile telephone services and with it followed a preponderance of cheap e-mail services.

In our study, we obtained data whereby former students of the School of Information Sciences at Moi University keep in touch through their Infosciences@yahoogroups.com. Through this New Communication Technology network, the subscribing graduates whose ethnic background is multifarious exchange views on many issues (current affairs, their new exploits, reminisce on their past without any hard feelings etc.). Intra-group distinctiveness is at times maintained through their use of a code that is only known to them. They do not necessarily have to harp on and perpetuate negative ethnicity as (8) shows. The excerpt comes from a hot issue involving a jazz maestro who had purportedly been running what the state called a cult like church. He had in custody at his luxurious residence a large number of his church members including a popular television anchor who quit her job to manage the maestro's music recording business. In the

conversation excerpted here, five contributors from different ethnic groups gave their opinion on the maestro's presidential ambitions:

**Context:** A contribution on the Infoscience yahoogroup network about a cult like scandal involving a jazz maestro.

8.

T1. I have watched half of this Gentleman's interview at K24 yesterday. Isn't he a sharp witted orator? **Jaluo Jeuri** and extremely bright! Or is he using this to cover ills we can't decipher with a naked eye? What are your opinions **Wangu watu**? Just methinks

(**Jaluo jeuri** – a crafty Luo, **Wangu watu** – my people)

T2. This guy has hypnotic power.. no vanity discernible from his speech at all. I think he's the real deal. ** just got part 1 though link slow *mbaya!* (terribly slow Internet link)

3. The real deal you say!!! On Presidential Campaign: "I am just about to sign a massive contract with PepsiCola... ....."I might just end up funding this thing single handedly" BUT DO I SAY!

He is hard hitting, words flow out of him with bewitching coherence. The problem is how to seamlessly fuse God and Kenyan Politics! He should speak of the latter more. If he took the latter and dedicated the stamina and wit he is exibiting here, he could sweep the Kenyan young generation by surprise, The R***** of Kenya will wonder what hit them!! But he was right, this A***** Scandal has brought him out and he won't go back!!!

4. He has to decide what he wants to do. Is it jazz, gospel or politics? He has the political gait, but if he has to succeed, he needs to drop religion, jazz is no problem, in fact it might help if he can sing a little before addressing the campaign meetings. 2012, we are set for real drama!

5. Yes Mhe M*******, That is exactly what I thought of him. Drop religion or just push it to his Runda Palace and lock it there, then paint the town red with Politics of 'Change is coming' sweetened with Jazzy melodies. I was even tempted to think of him

debating the R**** of Kenya on issues of the day..... he will show them dust. And he was very clever when he talked of R**** and K*****....mentioning the Govt's failure but not out-rightly condemning in the usual insult-laden version of Kenyan politics. Religion will be his toughest hurdle! Watch this Jazz Maestro!!

In T1, an interlocutor introduces the topic as s/he asks colleagues to give their views on the jazz maestro who had been caught in a scandal of keeping his members largely young girls in his house. He deflects the people's attention from the scandal to his purported presidential ambitions saying he will run in the next general elections scheduled for 2012. The writer of T1 starts by giving his opinion saying this is a wonderful orator of Luo origin.

T2's response ups the interest in the discussion as s/he too concurs with T1 although s/he says that s/he was not able to watch the maestro's entire talk. The contributor in T3 jokingly, it appears, offers to bank roll the maestro's campaign. S/he then concurs that the maestro is a strong candidate and could easily appeal to the youth and give the existing politicians a run for their money. This is what T4 takes up but cautions that the maestro has to choose between, religion, jazz and politics. In his opinion, he is more suited to politics than any of his other callings. He advises that the aspiring candidates could use his musical talent as an entertainment preamble during his campaigns. T5's contribution is an affirmation of the foregoing writers' views. While admiring the maestro, s/he argues that the maestro could use the theme of "change" and make scathing attacks on the current politicians. He says that, in his speech, the maestro's veiled political attack on the politicians is a pointer to his razor sharp intelligence that should be exploited.

On balance the infoscience yahoogroup network discourse analyzed here is about politics. However, it does not negotiate myopic political identity that is ethnic-based. Instead it is broader and is based on politics of generational identity. Though we have concealed the contributors' names (ethnic markers), they appear to be from diverse ethnic backgrounds yet in their contribution they castigate the older generation of politicians and see a generational change of politics in the maestro. This and other discussions by this network show that the group uses the New Communication Technology through the Internet to discuss diverse issues. The

group also censures itself since it does not degenerate to identifying with their ethnic groups. Even when ethnicity is mentioned as seen in T1, the subsequent turns' writers ignore it and focus on the broader issue. By so doing, the network comes out as one with a mature appreciation of the significance of New Communication Technology in enhancing communication for meaningful development.

## 5. Conclusion

The present chapter sought to discuss how the cell phone text messages and social group networks as New Communication Technologies are used to negotiate identities in Kenya. This was done so as to illustrate whether or not the new technologies are being used to perpetuate hegemonic and narrow ethnic identities against the backdrop of the country's rampant ethnic-based political parties. On this basis, the chapter argued that identity is dynamic and not static. We contended that identity is negotiated from time to time and perceptions could change within a very short time span.

By analysing SMS texts in the run up to and after the disputed 2007 presidential elections, it has been shown that using the social identity theory, there is some evidence of the SMS texts portraying negotiation of blocks of ethnic identities. In particular, the data showed that before the elections ethnic identity and stereotypes of perceived political rivals were rampant. However, the outcome of the hyped up strong ethnicity feelings and identities drastically made the SMS writers to rethink and start renegotiating a national identity. This was clear when the writers started viewing themselves as innocent masses subjected to suffering through myopically following the political party leaders. The high noon of the broad national identity negotiation is seen in the use of New Communication Technologies by members of a profession through their networks. Though hailing from diverse ethnic backgrounds, the contributors to this network displayed mature use of the new technology.

On balance, the chapter has shown the pros and cons of identity negotiation vide the New Communication Technologies in Kenya. It has come out that though technological development is meant to ease communication and speed up development, it is possible to plunge society into untold suffering if not carefully utilized. It is true that access to information is a basic human right and a major prerequisite for development. For this reason, the Kenya government efforts to regulate the media and communication sectors in the last two years met strong opposition. But if unregulated and haphazard use of New Communication Technologies could plunge the young developing country into untold suffering, then there is need to support the move to regulate the use of New Communication Technology gadgets through registering one's cell phone line with the service providers by supplying one's bio data. This could guard against money laundering, terrorism, kidnapping and killing. After all, the regulation is already in place even in the developed democracies with the ability to counter terrorist attacks and kidnapping Kenya, which lacks the capacity to counter sophisticated terrorist attacks, cannot afford to expose itself to such a danger in the name of safeguarding the right to laissez-faire freedom even when the dangers of the same are known as seen when a self-confessed kidnapper-cum-serial killer was recently arrested.

**Abbreviations used in the chapter**

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|---|---|
| **IDP** | Internally Displaced Person |
| **KANU** | Kenya African National Union |
| **KHRC** | Kenya Human Rights Commission |
| **KNCHR** | Kenya National Commission on Human Rights |
| **NAF** | Netlinguistics Analytical Framework |
| **NARC** | National Rainbow Coalition |
| **NTC** | New Communication Technologies |
| **OTC** | Old Communication Technologies |
| **RoK** | Republic of Kenya |
| **SMS** | short message service |

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