

## Timely Blessing; Global Utilization of Internet Social Forums in Realization of Millennium Development Goals in Developing Countries

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### Abstract

Internet being an educative, entertaining and informative platform for both formal and informal activities is emerging as a key resource towards exchange of ideas, information and opinion meant for realization of millennium development goals.

Internet Social Forums have thus created electro space and new page to rethink, develop, lobby, discuss, exchange, share, integrative and strengthen both national and global agendas.

Forums such as the skype, netlog, facebook and twitter have emerged as favourite opening for social-economic, political, psychological, physiological and physical issues that catalyze development and aid achievement of sustainable development of Nations World Wide.

Developing countries need to continuously embrace and maximize on utilization of this forums to realize universal education to all gender, equity, end poverty and hunger, improve and realize optimum child health, control and combat HIV/AIDS, realize environmental sustainability and effect global partnership. Through these forums a number of nations have managed to revolutionize on items such as political ideology and leadership, power control and good governance implementation, economic activities such as agriculture, business, fishing, mining, and entrepreneurial skills among others.

This paper intends to analyze the effects of internet social forums as a virtue or timely blessings for realization of Millennium Development Goals (MDG's).

**Keywords:** Internet social forums; Millennium development goals; Developing countries

### Introduction

Internet Social Forums are online electro-space; online discussion sites where individuals hold discussions share their ideas, feelings, opinions and thoughts by way of posted messages. These forums have particular structures and operational and tree-like in nature. For anyone to participate in the discussions then registration to the site is a must. To join one is required to sign in and administer a password to his/her address. Posts normally known as threads are visible to any other member of the forum registered.

Thus, confidentiality and privacy of information and messages posted are not maintained. With forums topics, sub-topics, themes and subthemes, each new discussion started can be replied by as many people as they may wish to. Participants of any internet social forums may use their real identification or may remain anonymous depending on the motive and agenda of joining such social forums. The administrators of any internet social forum are referred to as moderators while the participants are known as members. Individuals visiting the site are referred to as "guests" and may take tour to the site though may not be able to view discussions that require administrative or membership preferences. One may also search for individuals using their names but to view their profiles then one has to register as a member and post requests.

A member to sight enjoys the preverange of starting a particular "group" within the membership. A "group" refers to a number of individuals with same ideology, background or share same thoughts and interests. These could be individuals who went to the same school, attended the same region, district village, province, country or continent. One can as well "tag" photos of their friends or themselves for others to access. Members may also start or inform others of particular

events such as: parties, re-unions, gatherings, meetings and assemblies.

Internet social forums keep track records of all the conversations and discussion of any member. This is kept in a chronological manner (from the newest, new, old to the oldest posts). In case of harking in the internet site then some internet software are provided for purposes of security of the social forum.

Trip code system where individual passwords are allocated to each individual is used.

Some trip code systems may be insecure such that one may guess the password and such instances "word or letter" codes are provided. One indicates a guiding phrase or sentence to activate the password.

To access information of other members one sends a request of friendship, membership or inclination and options are providers such as: accept, ignore or reject - on acceptable, one is activated to view other members' posts and on rejection, one is blocked from accessing other individual posts.

Forums rules and regulations are maintained by the moderator or administrator/s team and may block or deactivate membership of any

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individual or group if they are threats to existence of that particular internet social forum. Members have a “wall” to post their particular messages and may also code and post on the “walls” of their friends. One is also provided with options of viewing “individuals they may know” or participate in “events they may know”. Blocking a member from the forum is done systematically by the “administrators” through sending a “warning” first. If the member persists as a threat to others then a “ban” is given for a few days or months and if it does not work as a disciplinary measure then a “total ban” or “permanent ban” is given to that particular member. This means that the member ceases to access and participate in such a social forum. Information on technological development such as: agriculture; e-farming, infrastructure; e-development, economic; e-business and e-trading as well as e-learning may be accelerated for achievement through these social platforms. Governments in developing countries may develop policies and frameworks to embrace these rapidly growing social cyber spaces in reaching out to the masses and implementing guidelines and policies.

### Common Internet Social Forums and Operational ideologies

Currently, common Internet Social Forums include: Skype-where audio visual attributes enhance and spice discussions through the use of webcam companion, netlog, twitter-where posts are referred to as “twits” and facebook among others.

Some factors that are maintained in most Internet social forums include; age limits, maximum friends/funs limits and blockage on duplication of groups/events and names.

The following Figure 1 depicts the ideology and operations of Internet Social Forums

To analyze the principles and the attributes of Internet Social Forums, one may narrow down to major forum such as Facebook. This Internet social forum has seen emergency of mobilization strategies through sharing information by the masses. The following factors are some that comprise and constituted Facebook. The following Figure 2 illustrates the ideology of Facebook

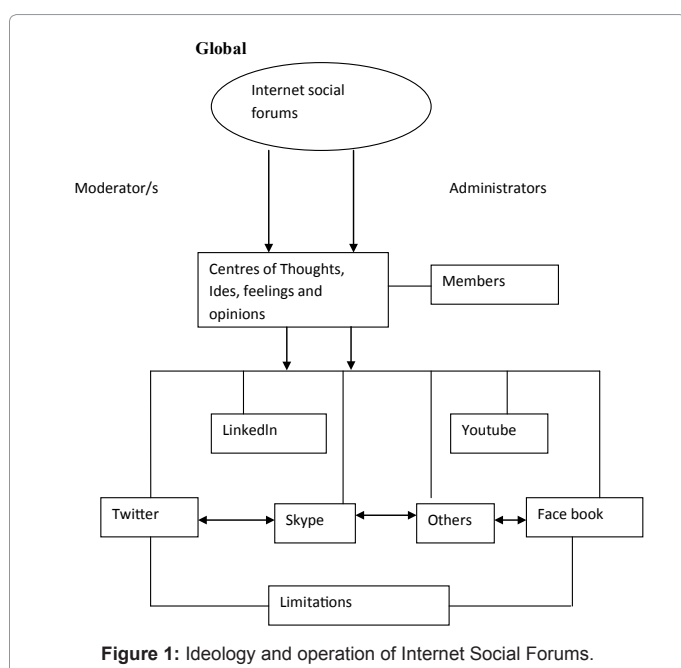


Figure 1: Ideology and operation of Internet Social Forums.

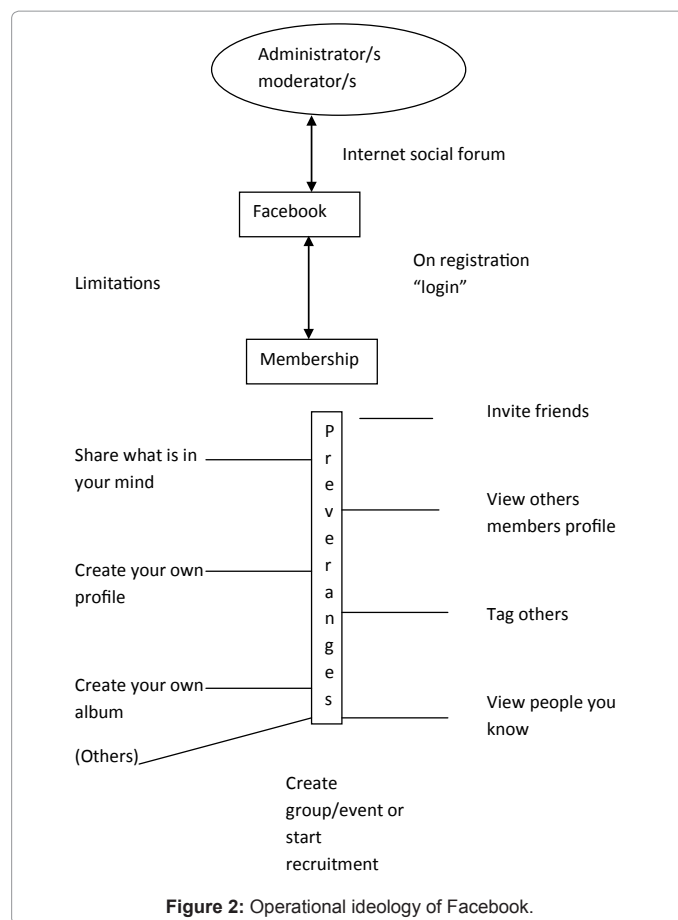


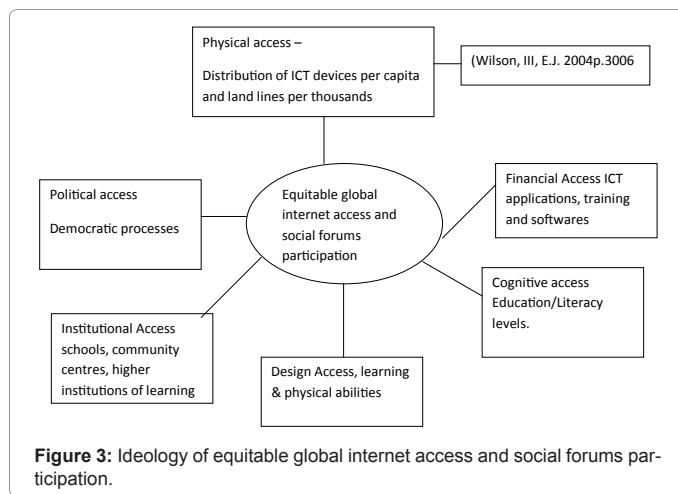
Figure 2: Operational ideology of Facebook.

### Impact of Internet Social Forums on Development

Internet social forums are rich platforms of exchanging and sharing information meant for catalyzing development oriented discussions. Development is measured by parameters of socio-economic, political, physical and physiological attributes, education, environmental sustainability and equity in resource allocation as well as equality in all spheres of human undertakings.

In Kenya Millenium Development Goals are used as the reference point for sustainable and realistic development. Through Internet social forums the government may engage the citizens in meaningful discussions and sharings in areas of leadership and governance, structures and planning prioritization and projections. According to Hasna Vancock (2007) sustainability is a process involving all aspects of human life and not static but dynamic with no specific fixed destination. As a process any Nation realizes economic prosperity, environmental equality, social equity and availability of basic education for all, availability of affordable health care for all and elimination or combating HIV/AIDS. Utilization of local material for optimum production in industries as well as having a well trained society on formal, informal and technical issues.

Online social net workings or forums have reduced the world into a global village where information is instantaneously shared irrespective of distance and time. These forums have also created “online community” which includes market and auction business, electronic bulletin boards, shared interests and others [1].



Blandard and Markins, 2004 notes that a community in which information and communication technologies particularly the internet, facilitate the interaction of members sharing one or more individualized and generalized objectives. Hence, these forums facilitate and connect individuals sharing either the same interests or existing interpersonal relationship such as; colleagues' friends or family members. Thus, family unity and friendship bonding in socialization can be built or destroyed through these forums. Firms and business entities, companies and factories are continuously using internet social forums to sell their products, create a global brand and create empires in demand of their products.

Education institutions have joined these forums not only to popularize and advertise their programmes but also reach out to former students (alumni) and interested parties of their activities. Schools have managed to raise funds through these forums, non-governmental organizations and private sectors have managed to mobilize masses on particular agendas on these forums and governments have either managed to monitor mood of the citizens or have been "muscled" out of power through the same forums. Marketers have managed to evaluate and implement strategies to maximize on sales through "appealing marketing potential" [2]. Companies in different specialties such as: air lines, miners, road and rail transportation among others are now advertising on these social forums. The act of engaging social networking internet forums for participants should be promoted corporate wide to create the always on, always connected and always marketing culture [3]. So that it is embedded and integrated to the organization driving force to react quickly to its customers and evaluate performance and relevance in the market.

Employees of any company or institution could also be encouraged to participate in the discussion and provoke such discussions for the well being of the employer/ company/ institution/ industry.

Environmental conservatism firms post and engage the world on major environmental matters of concern, all aided towards realization of a conducive, healthy and green environment that sustains and protects life. The war against HIV/AIDS has been widely and rapidly taken to electro-space through these forums, individuals share their experience and advice each other even without the physical contact of or encounter to each other. Health matters, topics and agenda's have been created. For example the fight against "cancer" globally has been dominating these forums and the war still continues.

It's imperatively clear that internet social forums are the "in thing" in today's world of global sharing networking, integration, connecting and consulting towards realization of equitable and sustainable development. Individuals have been able to access education through these forums, groups have mobilized funding and successful events have been organized and held all in the live of realizing and attaining comfortable life for all.

## Challenges of Global Internet Era

Internet social forums are timely blessings with a couple of challenges in accessibility and utilization globally. There are great disparities in opportunity to access the internet, the information and educational/business opportunities tied to this access and utilization between the developed countries and the developing nations/countries. The disparity has let to global digital divide [4]. Due to the uneven global development, internet has developed unevenly as well throughout the world [5] leading to poor technology, education systems, labor markets, democracy and governance, tourism and infrastructure in most developing countries.

Krueger 1993; Attewell and Battle (1999) notes that computers and internet provide users with improved education and higher wages hence improved quality of life and therefore those nations and people with limited access are disadvantaged and the issue of equality in information sharing and knowledge platforms differs greatly. Despite the explosive growth of technological advancement and usage of internet in developing countries, a disproportionate number of users are still concentrated in developed countries especially the G8 countries-Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the UK and the USA [6].

Several factors hinder total utilization of internet by all in developing countries, high life costs, economic priorities, English language, dominance, the lack of relevant content, the lack of technological support and disparity in literacy rate are some of the barriers to overcome [6]. Although internet has been referred to as, "great equalizer" [7], it is also a vicious tool of massive destruction or ethical matters, acts of terrorism and internet robbery.

To achieve equitable global internet and access and social forums participations then all the following factors must be kept on checks and balances. Figure 3 illustrates the virtuous tool of development based on internet social forums.

## Recommendations

Equitable in global exchange of information is achievable through the usage of internet websites and especially internet social forums. To achieve mutual benefits globally, developing countries need to plan and strategize accordingly so as to reach out and empower the masses through the following attributes:

- Equal and affordable education and training for citizens
- Create community learning centers equipped with computers and connected to the internet.
- Empower all schools-primary & secondary by providing ICT accessories
- Lower taxes for computers and accessories

- Develop policies to train the adults through “Ngumbaro” system (adulteducation system in Kenya) of education among others.

## Conclusions

Internet social forums provide basic and freedom oriented platforms to share and exchange thoughts, ideas feelings and opinions. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed a paradigm shift from the old methods of sending and receiving information and technological advancement through internet communication has greatly replaced paper work. The art of mobilization has been simplified and information sharing is now instantaneous. Individuals should not only join these forums but participate in setting global agenda and enhancing creativity and innovation in socio-political ideologies, economic activities, physical and physiological attributes environmental matters and effective education and training for all in realization of sustainable development globally and more especially in developing countries.

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