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ABSTRACT

Social media is conceived as a tool for interaction within the information society. With many social media platforms globally, the importance of social media in today's socio-economic development cannot be disputed. It offers unique opportunities that are advantageous to socio-economic development, but it also presents real dangers. Nevertheless, social media is growing explosively. Many developing countries are now embracing Web 2.0 tools, among them social media for the provision of information services. This has been considered as a strategy for developing countries for critical high improved network communications, leading to better, efficient and effective socio-economic development. With proper and effective social media, there would be high and improved economic productivity, better governance, education and quality social life. This paper, seeks to address and discuss social media and the opportunities it presents as well as challenges encountered. The paper also provides recommendations.

Keywords: Social Media, Web 2.0, Socio-economic Development, Information, Kenya

1. Concept of Social Media

Social media is conceived as a tool for interaction within the information society. With many social media platforms globally, the importance of social media in today's socio-economic development cannot be disputed. Social media offers unique opportunities that are advantageous to socio-economic development, but it also presents real dangers. Nevertheless, social media is growing explosively. This is because it is viewed as key for development in developing and developed countries. There is increased provision of information and services that are available

through social media. Many developing countries are now embracing Web 2.0 tools, among them social media for the provision of information services. This has been considered as a strategy for developing countries for critical high improved network communications, leading to better, efficient and effective socio-economic development. This means that with proper and effective social media, there would be improved economic productivity, better governance, education and most importantly quality social life. In Kenya, the growth of small scale enterprises has been witnessed with the establishment and growth of social media. In schools, colleges and universities, social media has influenced the building of an academic and research community by providing communication tools for knowledge sharing.

“Before the web came along, there were only three ways to get noticed: buy expensive advertising, beg the mainstream media to tell your story for you, or hire a huge sales staff to bug people one at a time about your products. Now we have better option: publishing interesting content on the web that your buyers want to consume” (Scott, 2010).

Over the years, there has been a tremendous growth with many social media platforms globally, creating major impacts to the users. As a result, the social media of today is diverse and difficult to understand by different users. In spite of this and in response to its ever-increasing penetration rate, it has attracted yet many people and institutions, creating fierce competition. In the Kenyan context, social media has continued to change and plays a key role in how people behave, create and share content using Web 2.0 technologies among them social media.

In present times, many social networking sites have emerged and have eased the burden of communication and interaction in the society. People are able to share common interests which affect business transactions.

Mark Dyke (as cited by Wright & Hinson, 2009) defines social media by saying, “Social media are the means for any person to: publish digital creative content; provide and obtain real-time feedback via online discussions, commentary and evaluations; and incorporate changes or corrections to the original content”. Carton (2009) says, “Social media are really just technologies that facilitate conversations.” In our view, social media is not just about human

conversations; it is also about a user interacting with information. It is about sharing these interactions in form of information. We define "Social media" as technologies that facilitate interactions between human beings and information with the intent of creating and sharing ideas.

2. Use of Social Media in Business

2.1. Social Media and Customer Service

Social media plays a major role on customer service delivery. These services provision on social media must always be integrated with the organisation's traditional services and other support services or functions. With this regard, "Social media has changed the face of customer service and support forever. Every company must be prepared to respond effectively yet without giving away the store" (Wollan, Smith, Nzou, & Catherine, 2010).

Social networking sites in Kenya such as LinkedIn, Facebook, twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp among others, have allowed organisation customers to have a louder voice as and when they carry out their business transactions. This is witnessed as a result of the emerging growth of technologies. It has allowed customers to inquire, give feedback, buy products and get services and even poke the very same companies they buy from. Many organisations view this particular scenario as good and bad in the sense that it allows them to get in touch with their customers easily yet putting organisation's reputation at risk.

Wollan et al. (2010) argue that, "before social media, customers had little choice but to go through the customer service channels that a company established: the phone, e-mail, its web site, and so on. Its processes for requesting service or filing complaints (or compliments) were rigid." This means that customers were unable to air their views for the company, especially launch complaints. Their views or complaints were very much limited, hence their ability to spread damaging feedback about the company was well protected by company to avoid censorship and bad publicity.

In Kenya, bank customers for instance prefer using social platforms rather than emails or phone calls. Due to this, banks in Kenya use such platforms to convey products and services, market information as well as respond to customer needs. "... customers are able to quickly raise their

issues through social media, and these websites have become important platforms for banks to build relationships with their customers” (Standard Digital, 2014).

2.2. Social Media Marketing and Sales

With the establishment of Web 2.0 tools and the internet, advertisers have alternatives for promoting and marketing their products and services. In the traditional media, social and economic development was hampered due to ineffective technologies. With new technologies in place, Web 2.0 among them social media and the internet, has become the standard for advertising, marketing and selling products and services in most parts of the country.

According to Steven, Hairong, and Joo-Hyun (2005) “as advertisers scramble to find alternatives, rich media are quickly becoming the standard by which the sophistication of the internet advertising is being judged.” They argue that rich media ads contain content created with new technologies which are used to deliver high aural and visual impact.

These technologies are integrated alongside social media platforms. Most of these technological tools enable social media to become both a social and an economic giant. It is these tools that attract and draws the attention of users to engage in business transactions besides socialising, knowledge and information sharing. As a result many enterprises and consumers have recognised the web as their major online market.

With the ever-increasing usage of Web 2.0 tools, again enterprises have varied experiences. Over the years, there has been a downturn and upward change in online commerce. Purushottam & Amit (2005) argues that, “This change in the fortunes online retailing has stimulated businesses to analyse their approaches to online advertising in the hope of increasing their effectiveness.” Stafford (2005) adds that “the potential exchange of products and/or services for value is implicit in the concept of e-commerce; goods and services are targeted to audiences and offered for sale via the network.”

Social media has brought new life of liberation on how businesses do marketing across the country. It is perceived to be a better option as compared to main-stream media which has

always been very expensive to the extent that advertising on Television, Radio or on the local dailies is costly especially for business start-ups. To this end, Social Media is tailored at improving information and promoting products and services online.

2.3. Social Media and good Governance

The use and availability of social media in the present world has helped enhance democracy and good governance. A country that enjoys political goodwill means that it embraces good and quality governance and enjoys maximum democratic environment. All these put together are ingredients of socio-economic development. There is no country that will be able to develop itself socially and economically without political stability. What is clear is that social media has helped better advance socio-economic development through the social platforms by first ensuring and involving the community. This very same platform acts as a catalyst for change. Change of bad governance to good governance, change of how communities and societies engage and interact with each other, change of the economy and business conduct.

In Kenya Social Media has been used to promote open governance, transparency and participation. Examples of social media used to promote transparency include: Ushahidi, Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp etc. These platforms facilitate information sharing triggering actions for problem solving.

Social media then provides some level of public trust. This is contrary to the existing institutions such as commissions and courts which over the years have been enjoying limited trust. In the same view, Maina ; Musungu (as cited by Makinen & Kuira (2008) notes that “In contrast to institutions like parliament and the courts, which have never enjoyed much public trust, the media have been trusted as a democratic institution” Because of such issues it’s assumed that social media has influenced political activism. In 2013 for instance, Kenyans rallied themselves online in a protest against heft pay rise by legislators. Westgate mall attack also enlisted forums on social media. All these were concerted efforts to help unite Kenyans. The overwhelming power of social media brought Kenyans from all walks of life together to address common issues affecting them.

In business circles, Hanan (2013) indicates that, "...it was the use of social media that acted as the catalyst for change in an already unpredictable environment. The use and availability of social media easily created connections between prominent thought leaders and activists to ordinary citizens, rapidly expanding the network of people willing to take action." By social media, communities and groups, governments and organisations are able to carry out their transactions much better since they can not only reach multiple people but also potential investors.

After the postelection violence of 07/08, it was the usage of social media that promoted peace and became an enabler to the return of investors. The change social media has brought has enabled people to do business recording a growth in socio-economic. Businesses can market and advertise their products. Web 2.0 tools have facilitated increased sales of products and services to neighbouring towns and countries hence improving socio-economic development.

2.4. Social Media and Research

From a research perspective, "Social media continues to have a tremendous impact on how people behave, how they research, play, converse, form communities, build and maintain relationships; and how they create, tag, modify and share content across any number of sites and devices" (Kietzmann, Silvestre, McCarthy, & Pitt, 2012). Social media plays a very important role in academic research in Kenya. In essence it allows not only groups of individuals but also researchers to converse and share ideas. It has provided tools to create, modify and share information to large audience. For instance, the use of Institutional repositories and eLearning platforms has aided research in many higher learning institutions.

In response to these, businesses continue to grow with the availability of social media technologies. For example; a combination of business models including content-sharing sites, wikis, social networking sites and microblogs among other technologies available in the country have provided competitive advantage to numerous businesses.

To the business owners, these platforms enables them to not only target consumers but also aim at retargeting services to those who would want more information services. Through this

consumers are able to complete their purchase subscriptions. All these achievements are promotions and adverts made on social media. These developments have greatly impacted the research community by serving as a sound research agenda role whereby the value of social media sites is directly proportional to that of its users.

“The evolution of Web 2.0 has shifted the power online, from the static corporate content of the past to dynamic interaction driven by the active participation of consumers” (Kietzmann et al., 2012). Researchers and other consumers are able to create, modify converse with other researchers in similar fields. They are able to share content and research among networks. This way, information flow is faster and it facilitates effective decision making by organisations for competitive socio-economic developments.

2.5. Social Media and Communication

Social media is a form of media. People use these sites to create, modify and share content and current affairs. Hence it has greatly impacted many organisations. This is because social media continues to ever-increase, taking many different forms “which vary in terms of their scope and functionality” (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre, 2011). Subsequently, there has been a rise in social media which has democratized corporate communication. However, with massive investment in ICTs in the country, many businesses have been transformed through social media as a communication channel. Therefore, SMEs continues to grow through increased social media networking.

In many organisations in Kenya, social media has taken a new trend. “Social media are being utilized on an ever-increasing basis by corporations and other organizations” (Wright & Hinson, 2010). With the availability of Web 2.0 technologies in these organisations, social media is increasingly used for communications. Linke and Zerfass (2013) agree with the view that “Corporations have acknowledged these trends, and increasingly use social media platforms for communications.” This denotes that social media has established a new communications practices in several many organisations and these has been witnessed with the installation of fiber optic cables for speedy data transmission.

Furthermore, social media is being used as an alternative of getting and sharing information. For instance, during the postelection violence, short text messages (SMS) were used to communicate during and after the main-stream media ban. “People used mobile phones to communicate and circumvent the media blackout” Ramey (As cited by Makinen & Kuira, 2008). People used smart phones not only to communicate but also to do business. Tools like Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, Maps, weblogs provided information on the likely violence spots and markets.

Using #WeAreOne hashtag, Safaricom, Kenya's largest mobile-phone company, partnered with Kenya Red Cross to launch a fundraising drive using M-pesa mobile platform. The social media campaign helped raise approximately \$750,000 in donations. In 2011, similar partnerships by these two organisations raised around \$11.5 million for Kenyans facing severe famine through the Kenyans for Kenya campaign. These and other social media adopted initiatives have resulted to socio-economic growth.

2.6. The competitive business Advantage and global economy

Every organisation and their employees must know how to take advantage of social media and Web 2.0 tools to improve their organisations and also help leverage the available information into a competitive advantage for the organisations. It helps them increase sales, increase market share and also importantly create business. The Kenya for Kenyans, ‘Beyond Zero’ campaigns, We Are One and ‘Occupy Parliament Reloaded’ initiatives serve as the best examples of the effect that social media platforms can have to the socio-economic development. Companies and groups of individuals have developed business tailored social media applications.

iBizAfrica and other home grown platforms serve as examples of innovations which plays a pivotal role in facilitating competitive advantages. Many companies in Kenya are increasingly employing social media strategies to engage their consumers more effectively and bringing them closer as they widen their target market to have a global reach.

2.7. Transformation of an industrial economy and business enterprises

Information and knowledge are key ingredients in creating wealth – from the agricultural, industrial, social, political, education, to the information economy. “The social sector, too, can

benefit from social technologies. Nonprofit organizations and other sector players can use social technologies to gather information, crowdsource labor and solutions, raise funds, expand their volunteer network, build support, educate the public, engage supporters, improve collaboration and communication, and establish organizational structures” (McKinsey Global Institute, 2012).

Technology largely has driven organisations to change the way they operate and the way they manage. Organisations can engage the clients directly and vice versa. As much as they need social media and Web 2.0 tools they are also driven by the information systems that helps them make informed decisions, manage organisations effectively and efficiently henceforth remaining relevant in the current business set-up.

Kenyans have previously used social media to find fuel during shortages of fuel. #findfuel hashtag was used. The same social media was used during postelection violence to find food outlets and to find if it was safe to access such commodity. These situations made Kenyans learn how to use social media and its potential value to make an impact to the society and contribute to economic growth.

3. Social Media and Challenges

3.1. Technologies Injustices

Many people can access new technologies in most parts of the country but this fact does not mean technology justice. Many technology injustices remain unaddressed. For instance; many people could have access to a mobile phone. But the cost of using this phone is extremely expensive such that many can't afford to utilize social media. On the other hand, the level of connectivity is weak or not there especially upcountry. However, in most places the availability of electricity is a nightmare to facilitate phone recharge or power availability and as a result most people are not able to use the available technology to access and exchange or share information beyond the most basic level to promote socio-economic development.

Trace (2012) points that technology is needed to increase productivity and income in most developed and developing countries as well. Importantly these technologies do exist; all that needs to be done is a change on how social media is accessed. He argues that there needs to be a

change on the rights to access to the social media and how these rights are distributed. It's important that this kind of barriers are removed so that people from all walks of life can use social media technologies even just for the most basic services.

3.2. Social Media platforms Privacy and Security

Privacy and security concerns arise because of social-networking sites that are on the rise. Their popularity has grown tremendously, with access by millions worldwide. However, this appearance has caused uproar in many quarters over its privacy and security concerns. Many Kenyans are worried of their personal information online yet many others are ignorant.

According to Almeida (2012) in his paper on Web 2.0 technologies and social networking security fears in enterprises, says that, "Until recent years, when applications were launched only from desktop computers and servers inside the corporate network, data security policies were relatively easy to enforce." In his view, "today's organizations are grappling with a new generation of security threats. Consumer-driven technology has unleashed a new wave of Internet-based applications that can easily penetrate and circumvent traditional network security barriers." Organisations use Web 2.0 and social media networks to get things done. They use these technologies to allow customers to interact with the organisation as well as the information therein.

3.3. Web 2.0 technologies restriction through policy

Many organisations have embraced web 2.0 usage by employees. Still others have deemed it necessary to control some social media sites usage by employees. They have managed to do this through policy formulation. They do this because of organisation security concerns. Almeida (2012) argues that, "organizations restrict social media usage through policy, technology and controlling the use of user-owned devices." He point that "while blocking access to social media provides better security, it is widely accepted that it is never feasible nor sustainable in the face of emerging use in the 21st century. Instead, we are living in a future where organizations must plan and design environments with less control of employee activities." While this provides a sense of security to the organisation, it is not proper to restrict social media and Web 2.0 technologies.

3.4. Inappropriate Social Media and Web 2.0 usage

Social media and Web 2.0 tools possess serious challenges to the organisation if inappropriately used. Any inappropriate use of these platforms may lead to company reputation, brand and customers confidence loss. “Organizational leaders are facing real consequences when adopting Web 2.0 technologies, but they recognize a growing demand for employee usage.” (Almeida, 2012). Kenyan companies are on a delicate balance with the view of communicating to their online customers and at the same time protect their image from malicious attacks.

3.5. Reputation dangers of Social Media

In as much as social media presents reputational benefits, there appears to be a major down side of the very same reputation – risk. Social Media platforms reach millions of people worldwide who have access to the internet. These platforms are used for communication every second, day and night. As such it provides greater promotional opportunities to the business world. However, leaves huge gaps of uncharted risks. The information blogged or posted on social media can be about anyone or any organization and may poorly reflect organisation’s reputation. Since this information is real-time, facts may not be verified immediately hence may go unchecked. Removing an offending post may be very difficult and impossible to achieve. This justify why some public and private sectors are reluctant to invest in social media for their operations.

According to Miami Daily Business Review (as cited by Merrill, Latham, Santalesa, & Navetta, 2011), “Employees who disparage coworkers, management, clients, vendors or even the company itself, whether intentionally or not, can damage a company’s reputation. Ironically ... employees who praise their company’s products or services can unintentionally get their employer in hot water, too.” This clearly indicates that if social media is badly used, different behaviours finds their way being exhibited on company’s branded social media which ends up gravely damaging the organisation’s otherwise good build reputation online or offline.

3.6. Legal Risks of Social Media

“The legal risks associated with social media should be carefully considered prior to engaging in a social media strategy. The main risks include: employment, privacy, security, intellectual property and media risks” (Merrill et al., 2011). The same factors affect organisations in Kenya

and form greatest setbacks of companies adopting the application of social media in their transactions. Such are the legal and ethical issues associated with the internet. This phenomenon has rendered many organisations from engaging itself on matters to do with social media. Below we briefly discuss some of the legal worries of social media highlighted above:

3.6.1. *Employment*

There are many cases where employees have lost jobs due to their conduct on social media. There are also cases where applicants have been rejected based on the information found online. All these are happening due to numerous investigations of existing employees and potential employees. This is a danger because it may discriminate hiring based on social media research. It does violate civil and human rights. At the end, these acts may not only affect the socialability of the individuals but will adversely affect the economic well-being of the involved organisation as well, especially in this world of technology. Monitoring communications on participants in social media platforms amounts to privacy legal dangers. However, largely, social media application in organisations renders its security at risk by cybercriminals. In most cases, Kenyan organisations may not have proper security controls including legal backing that would help reduce the risks.

3.6.2. *Security Issues*

“Social media sites pose potentially increased security risks, and if a security breach arises from social media activities, the organisation may face liability. Security breaches may occur because of malware downloaded onto an organization’s website through the use of social media” (Merrill et al., 2011). This implies that, organisations may suffer huge lose from clients to infrastructures. For instance, this can happen when employees can download malicious applications from social media sites through organisation computers. This would corrupt the organisation computers and subsequently its information systems leading to loss of vital information.

“Spam, Social Engineering and Malware attacks are on the rise, with cybercriminals using social media as a rich source of targets. And the risk is to the business as the bottom line may be affected due to lost revenue, tainting of the reputation and brand, loss of intellectual property, and increased costs to repair the damage” (SANS Institute, 2012). The social media profiles provide key entry points for potential organisation attackers who would indeed pose really

dangers to the organisation. Since there are many online clients who rely on these sites, they would be tricked to unknowingly use such sites to providing confidential information that would eventually be used for personal gain by malicious ‘look-alike’ social networking sites.

3.6.3. *Intellectual property and media risks*

Many organisations don’t understand about copyright issues and its legal implications. This is so dangerous to the organisations particularity in online platforms. Organisations that host content that belong to someone else or a different organization on its website would lead to copyright violation. This can be done by its employees either knowingly or unknowingly but nevertheless would cost the organisation a fortune. This is an economic deterrent of the social media usage. This is an organisational challenge and sensitisation of intellectual property is needed to aid the understanding of legal implications of intellectual property.

3.6.4. *Defamation*

“Defamation is yet another common claim that may result from social media activities, and companies need to be aware that they face potential liability for defamatory statements made by their employees about competitors, and for defamatory statements made by the public on the companies’ third-party social networking pages” (Merrill et al., 2011). Those engaged in online activities need to be aware and courteous. Although the constitution of Kenya is clear on defamation, many people have not yet embraced its importance probably because of social media law scantiness.

3.6.5. *Privacy*

Organisation need to protect the privacy of its employees and more so clients as it’s a concern for many Kenyans. These are people who usually join its social media platforms. They use platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, twitter and WhatsApp to provide personal information to the organisation with the aim of getting assistance. Therefore, organisation needs to safe guard members’ privacy and as well conform to the existing guidelines, privacy regulations and other online terms of use. Organisation internal policy must be at the centre stage as it is likely that the organisation may conflict with existing guidelines, privacy regulations of third-party sites. Hence causing a legal problem that would eventually affect its socio-economic activities.

3.7. Operational dangers of Social Media

According to Merrill et al., (2011), “When employees access social media platforms at work -- even those employees who are designated as social media spokespersons for the organization-- they risk endangering the organization’s networked computers by unknowingly acquiring malware, viruses, and spyware. Social networking sites, particularly Facebook and Twitter, are a favourite playground for those with bad intentions.” Still, “organizations depend on its workers to use technology to perform their job responsibilities and there is a need to trust these workers to protect company sensitive data” (SANS Institute, 2012). With the emerging technologies, hackers have capitalized on the use of social media in Kenya just like the rest of the world. They are browsing and using social media in large numbers targeting the organisation’s confidential information. Social media and Web 2.0 sites make it very easy for people with bad intentions to get into organisation systems and penetrate malicious codes to unsuspecting social media users through their profiles.

4. Conclusion

Social media plays a major role in socio-economic development in many organisations in Kenya by providing platforms that facilitates promotion of products and services. All this makes great benefits with reduced costs making a considerable contribution not only to participating organisations but a major contribution towards the country’s Gross National Product (GNP). Social media is rapidly spreading in Kenya from the Web to mobile technologies raising major concerns on security, ethical and moral issues in relation to application of social media and other ICTs. These issues are expected to continue as long as there is going to be emerging new technologies.

Much as there are different uses of social media in education, business, politics and society, organisations operate in difficult circumstances, which include inadequate clear policies governing social media and effective training for social media users. Nevertheless, social media alone cannot comprehensively bring about socio-economic changes into the country. Organisations need to integrate these platforms with their management information systems to advance their socio-economic developments.

5. Recommendations

- 1) Formulation of Social Media Policies and Procedures.
- 2) Enhance effective and efficient use of Social Media technological tools.
- 3) Adequately address Social Media ethical and moral issues
- 4) Retributive actions of social media platforms offenders.
- 5) Clients group formation for informed discussions and information sharing
- 6) Evaluation and monitoring online information seeking behaviours of Social Media users.
- 7) Improve skills and training for organisation employees to help mitigate internal dangers because of social media usage.

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