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**EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ACTIVISM IN KENYA**

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**DECLARATION**

**This is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of a degree of any other  
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## **Operational Definitions**

**Blog** – a website/online page containing an author's/group of writers' experiences, observations, opinions. Blogs are meant to educate, entertain or for activist reasons

**Clicktivism** – the use of social media and other online methods to promote a cause; it gets its name from the phenomenon of clicking to 'share or 'like' something online

**Emoticon** – a pictorial representation of a facial expression

**Facebook** – an online social networking site that allows registered users to create profiles, upload and share photos and videos, send messages and keep in touch with other users

**Hacktivism** – the practice of gaining unauthorized access to a computer system and carrying out disruptive actions as a means of achieving political or social goals. The term is coined from the words 'hack' and 'activism'

**Internet/online activism** – the use of electronic communication technologies such as social media to enable faster communications by citizen movements

**Like** – the action of showing support or approval for something by clicking a button labelled 'like' that comes with every post placed on Facebook

**Offline activism** – the use of non-violent forms agitation, which includes writing letters, political campaigning, economic forms such as boycotts, rallies and street marches

**Share** – the act of distributing a post on Facebook by clicking the 'share' button. It usually specifies who can see the shared post

**Slacktivism** – a portmanteau of the words "slacker" and "activism" that refers to actions performed via the Internet in support of a political or social cause, but which require little time or involvement. Examples include signing an online petition or joining a campaign group on a social media website

**Social activism** – intentional actions meant to bring about social, political, economic, or environmental change

## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

IPAB – I Paid a Bribe

KOT – Kenyans on Twitter

NCIC – National Cohesion and Integration Commission

SNSs – Social Networking Sites

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## Chapter One

### 1.0 Background to the Study

The growth of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and Twitter has transformed the way in which people create and share or exchange information and ideas – which has been accelerated through virtual communities and networks. Just as social media has evolved and grown over the past decade, so has the impact of social movements.

This trend points to the possibility of social media helping efforts by social activists in ways unmatched before. The rise of "Internet Activism" has gained impetus through the global appeal of social media, which has changed the dynamics of online "protest". The Internet offers two key traits that are relevant to activism: reduced cost for creating, organizing, and participating in activism, and a decreased need for people to be physically together to act together.

Activism, according to Obar (2012), is the action or policy of using vigorous campaigning to bring about social change. Activism, in this sense, connotes non-violent forms of agitation, which include writing letters to concerned parties, political campaigning, economic forms such as boycotts, rallies and street marches, as well the use of social media to facilitate civic engagement and collective action. This study shall adopt this definition.

A more modern concept associated with activism is "Internet Activism", which McCaughey and Ayers (2003) describe as "the use of electronic communication technologies such as social media to enable faster communications by citizen movements" (p. 79). Social media here includes Facebook, Twitter, blogs, e-mail and YouTube, among others, which enable faster movement of information to large virtual audiences. This study will adopt this definition of Internet Activism.

The new tools of social media have reinvented activism. Because of the level of freedom, privacy and space of expression that SNSs accords users, the traditional relationship between political authority and popular will has been overturned, making it easier for the powerless to collaborate, coordinate, and give voice to their concerns. As such, these sites have created a platform for ordinary people to vent and speak out. With more than 1.23 billion monthly active

users on Facebook and over 645 million on Twitter, besides thousands of blogs, the role of SNSs in social activism cannot be wished away; it is where the people are.

Activists have used SNSs to marshal numbers to oblige authorities to act. For example, an online petition can be circulated in minutes and e-signatures gathered to compel a government to act on a pressing social issue – as often happens in the West. The #BringBackOurGirls online movement that forced the Nigerian Government to begin rescue efforts for 270 girls kidnapped in April 2014 by Islamist terror group Boko Haram is one such example in Africa.

The manifest transformative nature of social media, and its expanding global appeal – a problem in a village somewhere in Western Kenya could receive global attention to the billions– demonstrates the power of social media platforms in causing change. Social media revolutions such as the #BringBackOurGirls movement, succeeded in garnering thousands of people to sign a petition to demand action from authorities (Ries, 2014). In that specific case, however, the online petition was accompanied by actual street protests, which caught the attention of the world and forced the government to commit to send troops on a rescue mission.

During the Arab uprisings of early 2011, which saw the overthrow of Presidents Zine el-Abdine Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, it is conceded that digital media played an important role in making the revolution possible – it had the authorities rattled as the Egyptian government even attempted to block Internet and mobile phone access in January 2011. However, the local context in Egypt played an equally important role in complementing the role played by technology-mediated activism.

Egypt had experienced a history of both online and offline activism since the early 1990s, supplemented by an independent press, which laid important ground work for the scenes in Tahrir Square in 2011. Ostensibly then, without the foundation laid by the street protests, the Arab Uprisings, in Egypt to be precise, might never have come to fruition. Likewise, it is noteworthy that in Tunisia, the self immolation of a street vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, in December 2010 in protest for the confiscation of his wares and the harassment by a municipal official, was what triggered public anger and violence, leading to the overthrow of President Ben Ali, and inspiring uprisings in other Arab countries. Here, the link between the revolution and



attempts at activism is that, while people had been venting through social prior to the uprising, it took one man's sacrifice to trigger the revolution.

Researchers have established that technology mediated activism works better when combined with interpersonal networks (Lievrow, 2013; Lim & Golan, 2011), where people participate in street protests and other forms of agitation when they are physically present.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Proponents of the Social Capital Theory, on whose principles social activism rides, identify mutual trust and the cooperation that arises from the connections that people forge as the social capital – the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. These are not elements that strangers can create by clicking, liking and sharing; over and above these, it must include sharing, interacting and creating identities on a level more personal than through a shared computer network.

Even as SNSs have become important avenues for social activism, their place in social activism has not been properly defined, and it is necessary to interrogate the role they play in facilitating activism, with focus on the Kenyan context. Keller (2014) observes that “weak ties seldom lead to high-risk activism”, and that “casting Twitter and Facebook as a catalyst for social and political revolution is a techno-utopian pipe dream”. Perceived activism and attempts at online revolutions are often started by people who sit in front of their computers and “like” or “share” pages, without actually going out to protest, which defeats the very purpose of social activism, especially in the increasing instances when no change comes out of “online” attempts.

Locally, examples of technology-mediated activism abound – cases in point are the #JusticeforLiz (<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/552/997/081/justice-for-liz-tell-kenya-to-prosecute-16-year-olds-rapists/>) and #OccupyParliament (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Kenyans-Occupy-Parliament-Now/279432342194380>) initiatives. The former was started to demand for justice for a girl who was gang-raped by four men, while the latter sought to mobilise Kenyans to oppose a plan by members of Parliament from awarding themselves hefty pay increments. It is noteworthy that, in the first initiative, despite the anger expressed online in both instances, no action was taken until protestors took to

the streets to demand the arrest and prosecution of the rapists. In the second instance, members of parliament vowed to award themselves pay increments despite online petitions, and only relented, ever so slightly, when Kenyans, marshalled by the civil society, camped outside Parliament to demand that the president refuse to sign the bill authorising the increments.

The question then arises as to the place of social media in activism. What role do SNSs play in the clamour for change? Can online attempts succeed in the Kenyan situation – is it possible to achieve change through social networking sites without input from an active civil society movement? This paper seeks to interrogate the role of social media in activism in Kenya.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The study sought to explore the role of social media in social activism in Kenya in different spheres and whether online activism could work without offline activism.

The specific objectives were to:

1. Examine the role of social media in activism;
2. Investigate the opportunities provided by social media for activism; and
3. Investigate the relationship between online and offline activism.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

The following will be the key research questions:

1. What is the role of social media in activism?
2. What opportunities do social media platforms provide for activism?
3. What is the relationship between online and offline activism?

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

### **Policy justification**

This study is significant as it will offer insights into technology-mediated participation in social and governance issues to qualify the hype around social networking sites as platforms for socio-political change. This will, in turn, inform the place of social media in communication strategies in different organisations – both governmental and non-governmental. It can either bolster the importance of SNSs as communication tools, or reduce the significance placed on such networks. Consequently, it will inform budget allocation on activism-oriented social media interventions.

### **Academic justification**

This study will add to the body of knowledge on social media activism, and its existing structures. As it will form part of the body of knowledge on the subject of the role of social media activism in Kenya, it will be an important resource to anyone seeking to explore the dynamics and workings of the concept of social activism through social media.

## **1.5 Scope**

The study examined the role of social media (specifically Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs) in agitating for social change. The focal point of the study was Kenya.

## **1.6 Limitations and Delimitations**

It was unlikely that the sample the researcher used was representative given that there are millions of Internet users in Kenya. While the target groups were representative of the most active clusters on the social media tools, they did not exhaust the range of people with an interest in social media activism. To overcome that limitation, the researcher drew participants from clusters – college students, opinion shapers in media and key personalities in the civil society – whose members consume social media the most.

## **1.7 Assumptions**

The study was conducted under the assumption that the sample was representative of population of social media. This was informed by the dynamism that often characterises social media use, and the fact that social media activism is a relatively new concept that needs further probing.

Further, the researcher proceeded with the understanding that responses given were strictly confined to exploring the issue identified, and would not arise from pre-conceived notions about the place of social media in activism, or made to advance a certain position.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework guiding this study, as well as summaries of literature in activism, presenting various perspectives into the place of social media in activism. The study is guided by the principles of the Public Sphere Theory advanced by Jurgen Habermas. This section will also examine the concept of civic engagement (in relation to the Social Capital Theory), and explore the application of social media in advancing activism. As well, it will consider activism in the Kenyan context. Further, it will explore the nexus between online and offline activism.

### 2.2 The Public Sphere Theory by Jurgen Habermas

Jurgen Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* provides a basis for discussions of the public sphere/s and, through it, influence political action. The concept of the public sphere, according to Habermas (1989), is an area within social life where public opinion is formed such that it is accessible to all. The proponent of the theory argues that in this realm, social class positions are irrelevant, and the connections between activists in the public sphere are formed through a mutual will to take part in matters that cut across society.

Habermas defines the public sphere as an imaginary society that does not occupy an identifiable place in a state. In Habermas's ideal world, the public sphere is "private people gathered together as a public to give voice to the needs of society within the state". Through acts of assembly and dialogue, the public sphere generates opinions and attitudes which serve to guide the affairs of state. In other words, the public sphere is the source of public opinion in democratic societies.

Rutherford (2000) notes thus:

“Public sphere remains a site for the production of public opinion; however, much of this is manufactured by people with money... and other forms of power... Mass media plays a double role here –as a vehicle for competitive spectacles, and a source of news.” (p. 31)

This is a view supported by both Kellner (2000) and Johnson (2001), who project Habermas' concept of the public sphere as the convergence of institutions and practices between the private interests of everyday life in civil society and those that deal with the interests of state power.

Habermas argues that the world of the mass media is a cheap but powerful medium through which the bourgeoisie shape public opinion. Media, he says, attempts – and often succeeds – to manipulate and create a public where none exists, and to manufacture consensus. This is particularly evident in modern politics, with the rise of new mediums such as social media, and disciplines such as public relations (Habermas 1989).

Habermas borrows the term "civil society" from another German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Civil society is the sphere of production and exchange, which forms part of the private realm and is distinct from the state. Civil society, though it includes other institutions, operates according to its own laws, but is able to represent its interests to the state through the public sphere.

### **2.2.2 The place of media in the Public Sphere Theory**

An important player in this theory is the media which, according to Habermas, has been transformed from that of facilitating rational discourse, into that of determining, constructing and sieving those discourses, to fit the bill of media corporations. This, according to Keller, means that the public only consumes what media feeds them, and are passive actors in public discourse.

Habermas notes:

"Inasmuch as the mass media today strip away the literary husks from the kind of bourgeois self-interpretation and utilize them as marketable forms for the public services provided in a culture of consumers, the original meaning is reversed."

This kind of contemporary 'compromise with reality' (Mayhew, 1997; Johnson, 2001) insist that we must learn to accommodate a conception of the public significantly that is less ambitious in its democratising motivations; so much less ambitious than Habermas' conceptualised it.

Dahlberg (2013) argues that among the various institutional conditions needed as mediations and groundings of communicative rationality are a democratic media system, a vibrant civil society,

and open governmental processes. In his criticism of Habermas concept of what media needs to do, Dahlberg envisions media institutions that can facilitate, not choke, the deliberation process.

### **2.2.3 The Public Sphere Theory and mobilisation**

The traditional idea of public sphere by Habermas - it is primarily centred in face-to-face interactions between actors – has been challenged by contemporary scholars. Thomson (1995) argues that modern society is characterized by a new form of interaction that he calls mediated “publicness”, whose main characteristics include a despatialised (not constrained by the limits of time and space). Accordingly, actors/people are able to see a wider range of things as they do not need to share the same physical location.

Modern society is also non dialogical (absence of dialogue) and non directional. For instance, TV anchors cannot tailor their discourse to suit the reaction of their audiences as their listeners are not visible to them. The Internet, however, allows a bigger interactivity. Even though social media users cannot interact in person, the use of symbols and emoticons often successfully convey intended reactions – a smiley face [☺] is used to express joy, for example.

Likewise, this modern version is associated with broader and more diverse audiences, where the diverse values and beliefs, and so on. Thomson’s “mediated publicness” has changed the power relations in such a way that not only the many (audiences) are visible to the few, but one in which the few can also see and interact with the many. Thomson states thus:

"The development of communication media provides a means by which many people can gather information about a few and, at the same time, a few can appear before many; thanks to the media, it is primarily those who exercise power, rather than those over whom power is exercised, who are subjected to a certain kind of visibility." (p. 54)

### **2.2.4 Key principles of the Public Sphere Theory**

*Disregard of status:* While this theory does not presuppose or advocate for equality, it nevertheless disregards status altogether. Even if this has never actually been realised, it still is recognised as an objective principle in the Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989).

*Domain of common concern:* The concept of “common concern’ is idealised as being key in the public sphere – it is what informs gatherings and brings people together in the first place. Harbemas notes that “By “the public sphere” we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens...” (P. 223)

*Inclusivity:* According to Harbemas, “everyone has to be able to participate” (p. 30). Whenever the created public established itself institutionally as an enduring social group, the “group” becomes the mouthpiece of the “individuals” (Harbemas, 1989). According to Kellner (2000), Habermas's links democratisation with political participation – which he identifies as the core of a democratic society and as an essential element in individual self-development.

### **2.2.5 Criticisms of the Public Sphere Theory**

Disagreeing with Habermas’ assertions on status and inclusivity, Fraser (1992) claims that the bourgeoisie public sphere discriminated against women and other historically marginalized groups, and that not everyone has access to the created publics. She points out this dominant masculinity that overshadows and excludes alternative publics from voicing their concerns. Accordingly then, this theory works only in favour of dominant publics.

Further, Fraser points out that that "there are no naturally given, a priori boundaries" between matters that are generally conceived as private, and those typically labelled public (p. 59). Therefore, the ideal of a common concern is simply too convoluted to amount to anything much, and if an individual succeeds in convincing the public to support a personalised agenda, that is what, for all intents, constitute a common concern.

### **2.3 The Social Capital Theory**

Social capital is the mutual trust and cooperation that arises from the connections that people forge (Putnam, 2001). Social capital thus refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions.

The Social Capital Theory was variously originated by Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, Mark Granovetter and Robert Putnam. Bourdieu broadly defines it as those resources inherent in social



relations which facilitate collective action (Bourdieu, 2013). These include trust, norms and collective cultures, as well as networks of association that are characteristic of any group which gathers regularly for a common purpose. A norm, for instance, may be the belief in the equality of citizens (Bourdieu, Calhoun & LiPuma, 1993).

Putnam's concept of social capital is made up of three concepts: moral obligations and norms, social values, and social networks (which must be voluntary). Putnam's central thesis is that if a region has a well-functioning economic system and a high level of political integration, these are the result of the region's successful accumulation of social capital (Putnam, 1993).

Seligman (1993) argues that publics lend credence to ideas that would otherwise not get audience if they were advanced by individuals. He writes:

"The emphasis in modern societies on consensus is based on interconnected networks of trust - among citizens, families, voluntary organisations, religious denominations, civic associations, and the like. Similarly, the "legitimisation" of modern societies is founded on the 'conviction' of authority and governments as generalisations."

Bourdieu's concept is pegged on his theoretical ideas on class, where he identifies three dimensions of capital: economic, cultural and social capital. His concept of social capital puts the emphasis on conflicts and the power function (social relations that increase the ability of an actor or group to advance its interests). From Bourdieu's standpoint, social capital is a resource in the social struggles, often carried out in different social arenas or fields (Bordeau, 1991).

### **2.3.1 Key concepts of the Social Capital Theory**

*It correlates with high levels of social capital*, which include education, confidence in political institutions as discussed by Brehm and Rahn (1997), and satisfaction with government and political engagement (Putnam, 1993). This is supported by the belief in self-reliant economic development without need for government intervention (Putnam, 1993; Fukuyama, 1995).

*The decline of social capital is a theme of social capital theory*. This is expressed by Putnam (1993), with the argument being that the level of social capital declines continuously.

*Factors in the decline of social capital centrally include mass media, which is seen as having a profound privatizing impact that undercuts social capital (Putnam, 1995).*

*The relationship between social capital and information technology is seen to be bidirectional, where high levels of social capital, such as strong non-electronic networks (offline relationships or personal networks), is a success factor in establishment of electronic-based networks (Fukuyama, 1995). At the same time, the spread of information technology creates networking infrastructure which encourages the formation of social capital (Calabrese and Borchert, 1996). However, information technology also has an “anonymising effect” that relaxes social norms and erodes social capital (Kiesler, Siegel, and McGuire, 1991).*

### **2.3.2 Criticisms of the Social Capital Theory**

Berman (1997) argues that without bridging the inequalities in the social capital, such as income and class differences, groups can become isolated and disenfranchised from within themselves, and from the rest of society.

Further social capital may not always be used for positive ends, and may encourage, for example, the growth of criminal gangs or dissenting groups to overthrow governments or destabilise nations (Perkins, Hughey & Speer, 2002). This is especially true where political institutions and democracies are not established, and which are then prone to succumbing to upheavals. In Kenya for instance, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission has been monitoring the use of social media by because of the danger it portents if used recklessly.

Lastly, because individual aspirations do not automatically translate into group aspirations, stratification occurs when members, in their quest to better themselves – economically and socially – pull in different directions. Thus, the concept of social capital may reproduce the very social stratification it seeks to eliminate; this seems to be an inevitable end, and social capitalists have been accused of doing little to alleviate this trend (Coleman, 1988).

## **2.4 Application of the theories in social media activism**

### **2.4.1 The role of social media in activism**

#### **2.4.1.1 Civic engagement**

Social media technologies provide new tools for civic organisers, political candidates, activists and ordinary citizens to reach out to others and galvanise community action on a wide range of issues (Norris, 2002). Political participation appears to have evolved over the years, in terms of the agencies, platforms, actions used for political expression, and the actors that participants seek to influence. The process of societal modernisation and rising levels of human capital are primarily responsible for the result of a particular engagement, and social media platforms seem to have the capacity to achieve this.

One of the best ways to become more engaged in the community is to be an advocate for change and to work for infrastructure or policy changes that can create more long-term impacts and solutions to issues of public concern. Activism and advocacy help to address the root causes of community issues (Carpini, 2000). A more involving communications environment, driven by growth in the Internet and social media, is rapidly changing the economic, social, and political landscape. For engaged citizens, the Internet provides ways to lower the costs of their engagement, improve its quality, and/or increase the types of activities engaged in (Obar, 2012). In addition to the impact of the Internet on organized elites and engaged citizens, there is also reason to believe it could be effective at reaching interested but inactive citizens.

Citizens in contemporary nations suffer from civic apathy, public scepticism, disillusionment, and general disinterest in conventional political process (Papacharissi, 2010). This are the same publics, he goes on, which exhibit interest in blogging, online news, net-based activism and online networking. The one characteristic these publics exhibit, he warns, is 'fatigue' with politics – a telltale symptom of the online nation that 'likes' and 'shares' without necessarily giving the monetary and networking support that causes require.

The author's primary concern revolves around how technology has remodelled how we function as citizens of democratic states, and how this has affected democratic processes. One of his arguments regarding this phenomenon is that there is no longer a public sphere that everything

happens in the same domain, which affects people's commitment to causes – indifference to social and civic matters. The result of this is that everyone develops one's own subculture and behaviour on how to handle matters, which works against collective action.

When they heralded the age Internet activism, its proponents did a lot of groundwork on its potential for social change, and how it would revitalise democracy, while empowering the people in ways impossible before. Meikle (2000) investigates these claims by testing the success of hackers and media activists in employing Internet as a tool of change to advance their causes. The author is, however, sceptical about what he implies is an “an uncensored hype” about the possibilities of social activism which “may be overrated”, and which need to be judged purely on the success they create.

Engaging youth in civic life has become a central concern to a broad array of researchers in a variety of academic fields as well to policy makers and practitioners globally (Sherrod, Torney-Purta and Flanagan, 2010). This is especially important for activism, which must find ways of keeping young people interested in an age when most youth would rather sit in front of their computers and create and like/share pages online rather than engage in street protests.

#### **2.4.1.2 Social media and mobilisation**

Different forms of social media have been used extensively to rally people around social issues and causes, and scholars have argued that the workability of social media for mobilisation depends on the manner in which information is designed and/or disseminated.

McCarthy (1977) studies how the use of social media affects participation in offline demonstrations. In a study of social media campaigns in Norway, he examines is the use of media transcends socio-economic divides to facilitate participation, and offers that participants reached through SNSs are normally those from lower socioeconomic classes, and are mostly young, as compared to those mobilized via other channels. He ultimately comes to the conclusion that social media represents an alternative platform of reaching different segments of the population. He also recommends that traditional mediums are just as useful in incorporating the remainder of the class populations.

Storck (2011), demonstrates that while possessing enormous potential to facilitate and expedite political mobilisation, SNSs are an inherently dialectical force that should not be treated as the ultimate liberators of society or as a force for coercing the masses. The author argues that at best, SNSs provide an organisational infrastructure as a form of alternative press, as well as generate awareness of the social issue at hand. On their own, he argues, social media may not adequately meet the civic and political needs of social activists.

#### **2.4.2 Placing social media in activism**

Dartnell (2006) demonstrates that online activism is a mature, new territory for non-governmental actors to raise awareness and develop support around the world. The Internet, he argues, has changed the approach to politics because of the “invisible support” of Internet users. The power of web-based activism, the author contends, is in its distributive power, able to reach millions of people in a short time; it injects the same level of credibility that print press accorded social movements in the 20th century, and which it still continues to do.

Consequently then, the contribution and significance of civic activism cannot be underrated. Dartnell investigates the political implications of technology mediated activism amongst the ‘faceless’ actors who use it, contending that people have become more active in political and social matters that they could not engage in before.

By empowering people and giving them the freedom to engage without being physically present is what sets this form of activism apart from the rest. In fact, as he argues, governance and social structures are evolving to accommodate the application of technological systems, such that, in future, the traditional methods of activism may altogether change.

McCaughey and Ayers (2003) demonstrate how online activists have not only incorporated recent technology as a tool for change, as well as how they have changed the meaning of activism, what community means, and how they conceive of collective identity and democratic change. The authors contend that activism implies whatever form of agitation that a group of people happen to be doing, as long as it is geared towards change, and that any such group is a ‘community’ if it is united in a common cause. White, writing in *The Guardian* (June 2013) disproves the notion that activism is only legitimate only that where individuals spend large

amounts of time physically in a place to demand or protest against something. Digital media, such as social networks, and email, “are the twenty first century town square”, he argues. The Arab Spring, for instance, not only came to global prominence because of the assistance of Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, but also because protestors used text messages to engage each other in a virtual civic space. What critics dismiss as clicktivism or slacktivism, he says, has managed to facilitate some of the biggest protests (such as the Arab revolutions) in modern history, providing “more social capital than any other source”.

Rutledge (2014) argues that social media has redefined activism by facilitating rather than decreasing advocacy, by lending voice to the hitherto “weak and unheard” – those who have been unable to take part in physical demonstrations now have a way to add their voices to causes.

The author argues that social media has changed public awareness through quick circulation of information, which is the baseline of change. She cites the example of the Haitian earthquake in 2010 which, but for social media, would not have achieved as much relief supplies as it did.

Further, Rutledge argues, social media technologies have changed the psychological impact of communications by changing people’s expectations about participation and individual agency. The ability to act, even if it is retweeting a post on the crisis in South Sudan, allows us to feel a level of involvement in events we might not otherwise have done anything about. This creates engagement and emotional buy-in and well as a sense that individual actions matter.

McCaughley and Ayers (2013) have sought to show how online activists have incorporated technology as a tool for change, as well as how they have changed the meaning of activism and redefined the essence of collective identity and democratic change. The authors are particularly passionate about the impact on politics of Internet activism. They argue that when a cause, for example is pursued on social media, it is not just the people from the affected country that take part in the process of change; rather, everyone the activists are able to reach joins in and lends voice to that cause.

An example is the abduction of close to 300 hundred girls by Boko Haram militants in April 2014 (Ries, 2014). When the atrocity was posted online, people from all over the world joined

the movement #BringBackOurGirls to compel the Nigerian government to pursue the militants. It is such instances the authors use to demonstrate the power of Internet in effecting change.

Online political activist movements have had rousing success in advocating for and achieving social change and that they are constantly growing (Jong, Shaw and Stammers, 2005). Through the formation of web-based networks, and through exploiting new communications technologies, as well as conventional media, people are able to get messages across to influence mainstream politics, often to address such issues as commerce policies, gender relations and the environment. An example of a case study is the propagation of the policies of Greenpeace to realise a greener world with less pollution. A more localised example would be the lobbying done by environmental groups and activists to garner support for a court case challenging the intention of the government of Tanzania to construct a highway in the middle of the Serengeti National Park. While the success of the case is not entirely attributable to online campaigns, the importance of social media activism was manifested in the way different lobbies used short text messaging and advertisements on Facebook to encourage people to demonstrate against the Tanzanian government should the case have failed.

Gilbert (2014) argues that the scope of social media focuses on the medium – that is, the different forms of online interaction – at the expense of the message, and thus ends up diluting the protest. Author Malcolm Gladwell, writing in *The New Yorker* in February 2011 said:

"People protested and brought down governments before Facebook was invented. They did it before the internet came along. Barely anyone in East Germany in the 1980s had a phone – and they ended up with hundreds of thousands of people in central Leipzig and brought down a regime" (p. 29).

Rotman (2011) compares the benefits and costs of engaging in social activism through social media. Have various online forums, for example, persuaded the Kenya government to pull its troops out of Somalia to, as some argue, stop al-Shabaab from executing terror attacks in Kenya? In another instance where, say, an activist is arrested for speaking against government, will posting a mug shot of oneself on the victim's profile help free the activist? Such questions have led the authors to examine possible positive and negative outcomes of technology-mediated

participation. In their study, the authors conclude that the benefits of social media activism outweigh its negative effects.

The use of social networking sites for activism does not fit within the reality of a "cyberspace" detached from physical reality, but rather acts as a tool that is used as part of a project of re-assignment of public space, to facilitate actions that may not happen as appropriately in the physical world – such as amassing, fundraising or gathering (Gerbaudo 2012). The author explores both the possibilities and risks associated with technology-mediated social activism.

Alternative media, Etyan and Yaron (2000) argue, will continue to play a role in election campaigns, but the exact scope and impact of this role is not yet clear.

### **2.4.3 Social media activism in Kenya**

Kamau (2013) investigates the role that social networking sites play in influencing political participation and civic engagement among Kenyan urban youth. Kamau notes that social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter have been positioned as important platforms for political participation among the youth, which also have the potential of sparking interest and augmenting youth participation in civic and governance processes among disengaged youth. What positions social networking sites to take up this role is their ease of accessibility and usability, appeal and convenience in participating in political discourses. Says Kamau:

“SNSs cannot replace the existing traditional structures of political campaigning and mobilization but on the other hand, campaign strategists and politicians cannot ignore the opportunity provided by SNSs in the mobilization process” (pp. 257-258).

While acknowledging the importance and role of social networking sites in facilitating political participation, the author, however, cautions that social media activism must be paired with traditional methods of activism to facilitate appreciable participation. According to Kamau, the mobilisation of people for any form of activism must primarily be done offline, with social media sites serving a complementary role.

Social media, the author concludes, have not got to a level where they directly impact on political choices among the users. He, however, notes that they are useful in shaping public



opinion, as well as mobilising people and resources, and are particularly effective in spreading negative propaganda to damage opponent's credibility. This is facilitated by the fact that social groups tend to believe messages posted by members of the same group.

Online platforms, particularly social media sites, in Kenya have become some of the most dynamic spaces for engaging the political establishment on social, economic and political issues. Debates varying from youth unemployment, environment issues, reproductive health rights and sexual violence, which have historically found difficulty breaking into the public priority list, are increasingly being heard (Mwaura, 2014).

Mwaura cites #StandwithLiz and #JusticeforLiz on Twitter (about a young girl from Western Kenya who was gang-raped by four men) trended online for several days, as Kenyans rallied to support a petition started by activist Nebila Abdulmelik urging the Inspector-General of Police to re-open the case that had at that time been closed. The online campaign was complemented by a protest in Nairobi on October 31 2013 where the protesters delivered a petition signed by more than 1.2 million people. As a result of the immense public pressure, police officers who had (mis)handled the case were disciplined, and the Director of Public Prosecutions initiated an inquest into the incident, leading to one suspect being charged and convicted.

#KOT – Kenyans on Twitter – involves a gallery of middle class Kenyans' who highlight social problems that range from racism at up-market eateries to rants about the constant traffic jams in Nairobi. While no noticeable change has been forthcoming from government, government officials often join in debates about social ills.

I Paid a Bribe (<http://ipaidabribe.or.ke/>) is an initiative of Kenyan anti-corruption activists fighting corruption in Kenya using the new technologies to crowd source corruption experiences. I Paid a Bribe is sponsored by the Wamani Trust of Kenya to bring IPAB to East and Central Africa, with its key objective being to provide a platform for people to expose public officials who extort bribes from Kenyans.

“Occupy Parliament” is one of the more recent activist movements that was created to challenge the conventional, “accepted” norms that have given birth to social inequity and injustice, oppression and intolerance. The movement turned to social networking sites – Occupy

Parliament on Facebook and #OccupyParliament on Twitter – to mobilise Kenyans to protest against a plan by Members of Parliament to award themselves hefty salary increments and allowances. This culminated into a protest that lasted several hours outside Parliament buildings, a demonstration of the power of social media sites in garnering numbers for civil causes.

Bunge la Wananchi is another notable platform for agitating for change. With a following of more than 15,000 members on Facebook, its mandate, as posted on its page is to “Facilitate sensible and responsible discussions of pressing current issues in the society”. Bunge La Mwananchi provides an alternative ‘parliament’ where members of the public can engage on various issues touching on politics and social responsibility. While Bunge la Mwananchi does not overtly engage in activism or take a stand on issues, it gives the online Kenyan public a chance to provide alternative views to counter what they consider to be a breach of ethical principles, and maladministrative injustices.

In 2006, Ory Okolloh – a lawyer-cum-activist – co-founded the parliamentary watchdog site Mzalendo (Swahili for patriot), whose objective was to increase accountability in government through tracking Parliamentary (National Assembly) sessions and politicians’ speeches (<http://info.mzalendo.com/>). And in 2007 when Kenya was engulfed in post-election violence following the disputed presidential election, Okolloh helped create Ushahidi (Swahili for witness), a website through which Kenyans would collect and share eyewitness reports of the violence using text messages services and Google Maps (<http://www.usahidi.com/>).

Okolloh has got a personal blog, Kenyan Pundit, which has been featured on Global Voices Online, a web-based community that defends online rights and freedoms and fights censorship, empowers isolated and marginalized communities with tools, skills and support to voice their plight and challenge marginalisation (<http://globalvoicesonline.org/about/>). Global Voices describes their objective thus:

“Call attention to the most interesting conversations and perspectives emerging from citizens’ media around the world by linking to text, photos, podcasts, video and other forms of grassroots citizens’ media, and facilitate the emergence of new citizens’ voices

through training, online tutorials, and publicizing the ways in which open-source and free tools can be used safely by people around the world to express themselves...”

Writing in *The Standard* (May 21, 2013), Nyambega Gisesa looks into the rise of online activism in Kenya, and its increasing importance in Kenyan politics. Social media sites, he argues, are the new front in the mobilisation of people for social causes, as evidence by the Occupy Parliament movement.

The blog WanjikuRevolution Movement that is run by Edwin Kiama – he also runs related accounts on Facebook and Twitter – reaches thousands of Kenyans with whom he engages on various issues such as governance its associated issues such as corruption and inflation (<http://edwinkiamo.blogspot.com/>). Through it, he accords different writers the chance to post various articles on issues they feel need attention. On Twitter, the #WanjikuRevolt has 13,500 followers and 1,300 Likes on Facebook.

Another blog that is active in terms of highlighting social ills is Laura Korongo’s A Kenyan Perspective (<https://laurakorongo.wordpress.com/tag/activism/>) where she profiles some of Kenya’s renowned figures in a bid to motivate good governance and responsibility.

#### **2.4.4 Online versus offline activism**

Online and offline activists differ noticeably in terms of socio-economic and political backgrounds, formal network and organisational cultures, and, to some extent, motivational aspects (Laer, 2014). Using digital communication channels, according to Laer, likely extends, but at the same time narrows the mobilizing potential, to a public of experienced activists, most likely linked to established organisations. The Internet is principally used by “super-activists” – most likely highly educated – leading him to conclude that the Internet reinforces participation inequalities, and that it might prove insufficient for sustained collective action participation and the maintenance of future social movement organizations.

Marcotte (2012) notes that fears that the Internet has somehow discouraged people from getting out in the world and having that critical face-to-face interaction that adds depth to our activism are misplaced. She argues that one can create invite chains on Facebook that will reach people that were unreachable before, and integrate them more readily into the community. The

distinction between online and offline platforms, she argues, is collapsing to the point of meaninglessness, such that what is done offline is actually online activism, which she justifies with the point that one will, for instance, send participants in a protest messages on Facebook or Twitter or even through e-mail, or find a big enough audience to convince through blog submissions and entries.

Marcotte further notes that the biggest problem with online activism is that the same technology that should make life easy can shut out activists' voices as well. Where people could get things done in the early days of e-mail, for example, today, a politician being petitioned online can use e-mail or messaging filters to keep off unwanted messages – one can block a user or multiple users at the click of a button. Happily for activists, he notes, there are always new ways to go about it. Where e-mails are filtered, for instance, one can use Twitter or write a blog, which one can then promote on Facebook, where what is posted is not limited to one's online friends, but to potentially every user who has interest in such a topic.

Social media activism is likely to have “some” impact if an online protest or petition is initiated by an influential person, as opposed to an unknown person (Lim & Golan, 2011). Carrying out a study based on political videos on YouTube, participants exhibited greater influence if the videos were presented by a person with greater persuasive power than by a person with low persuasive intent. Further, the researchers found out that persuasion worked only if the participants were willing to take corrective action.

Likewise, in a real world scenario, it would be difficult for technology-mediated activism to work if participants only show fleeting interest in an idea before moving on. Properly, if Internet users are unwilling to take part in an online protest, it would be even harder for them to agree to engage in a street protest which, essentially, is what it takes to induce change. Consequently, the authors conclude, unless there is a complementary effort from an active civil movement, social media activism may not achieve much.

Lievrow (2013) in *Alternative and Activist New Media* delves into the ways in which activists use social media and information technologies to gain visibility and voice, to present alternative views or to “counter dominant media culture”. By analysing major historical cases, the authors

seek to trace the history of alternative media, its objectives and achievements to demonstrate what makes alternative media more efficient and better suited to informing, warning, rebuking, and correcting and agitating for change.

During the Arab uprisings of early 2011, which saw the overthrow of Presidents Zine el-Abdine Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, it is conceded that digital media played an important role in making the revolution possible – the Egyptian government even attempted to block Internet and mobile phone access in January 2011. However, the local context in both Egypt and Tunisia played an equally important role in the revolutions (Faris, 2013).

It is noteworthy that in Tunisia, the self immolation of a street vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, in December 2010 in protest for the confiscation of his wares and the harassment by a municipal official, was what triggered public anger and violence, leading to the overthrow of President Ben Ali, and inspiring uprisings in other Arab countries. Likewise, Egypt had experienced a history of both online and street activism since the early 1990s, supplemented by an independent press, which laid important ground work for the scenes in Tahrir Square in 2011. Ostensibly then, without the foundation laid by the street protests, the Arab Uprisings, in Egypt to be precise, might never have come to fruition.

Gladwell, writing in the Atlantic.com in September 2010 (On Social Media and Activism) has also questioned the effectiveness of social media to organise physical protest. She says: “It's easy for people to participate online, but far more difficult to turn those words into action...” The concept that every user of the Internet is "a participating member of human society" fails to serve the purpose it is meant to – creating oneness of purpose – because the subtle argument then would be that if one does not feel like taking part, then that is fair enough.

The danger here is that if everybody had similar sentiments, no work would get done at all. Even when the events of a social movement affect one's life whether one participates in a social cause or not, that does still not guarantee that everyone would join a movement on that fact alone.

Gladwell does, however, concede, that online forums, despite their shortcomings as effective tools of activism, have the potential to inspire powerful movements, but only if there is clear leadership, strategy and authority, over and above what is the current situation.

Earl and Kimport (2011), deviating attention from the role of social media, challenge the popular view that online political activity is different from more traditional forms of activism. One of the questions they seek to answer is whether the global reach and speed of the Internet affects the essential character or dynamics of online political protest.

Here, the authors examine key features of Internet activism, and investigate what the characteristics portend for organisation and participation. They argue that the Internet offers two key affordances relevant to activism: reduced costs for creating, manage, and participating in protest, as well as decreasing or eliminating the need for activists to be physically together in order to make a cause successful – achieve results.

Further, the authors argue, a protest can be organised, simply through the creation of a petition page on, say, Facebook.

While acknowledging the speed and efficiency of such a method, it also raises questions as to its feasibility where, for example the established systems of government do not guarantee action unless there are actual protests – cases in point being Tunisia and Egypt. In Philippines, when President Joseph Estrada was implicated in mega corruption and senators voted to keep an envelope with incriminating evidence closed during his trial, an anti Estrada revolution quickly hatched and swelled overnight, reaching over one million in several days.

What triggered the movement was a text message that was quickly broadcast, drawing hundreds of thousands of supporters, who marched to the Supreme Court in the capital Manilla, choking traffic and bringing the city to a standstill. It was only after pressure mounted, and the people in the street threatened to march to Senate that the tide changed – the military chief switched alliances to support the incumbent’s vice president, and the Senate voted to allow the evidence in the envelope to be admitted in the trial.

The question in this scenario is: what if everyone had chosen to send that text message, like a page on Facebook, post a blog or engage in a rant on Twitter? Would the military have been compelled, on that basis alone, to prevail upon the president to resign? And would the Supreme Court have opened the envelope at all?

Tostevin (2014), writing in *The Guardian*, argues that while online activism truly empowers those who already active, in most instances, it simply creates the illusion of activism, without actually empowering actors or facilitating change. She says:

“In the land of social media, the position of "armchair activist" is open to all. You can change your profile picture to raise awareness, share videos and articles and keep in touch with charities by liking their pages. Making a difference seems pretty easy in the digital age. But is your contribution any deeper than a click?”

The number of people willing to get out on the street or engage in actual activism work is astonishingly little, the author notes. She gives the example of Facebook, where a significant number of users have more than 500 friends, giving them a potentially powerful network over which to broadcast. However, a study she quotes reveals that seldom do those who ‘like’ pages or ‘share’ causes follow that up with a donation, for instance. Return rates, the study notes, for online donations, are just a tenth of those of traditional methods, such as mail solicitation.

The study cited by Tostevin, published in the *Journal of Sociological Science*, looked at the Save Darfur page on Facebook. When it was initiated, the Save Darfur cause was one of the largest on the social site. The research team followed Facebook users over a 989-day period, noting that out of the one more than one million people who had signed up, less than 3,000 gave donations, only raising slightly over \$90,000 (about Sh12 million) in three years – a slim figure when compared to the wider (offline) Darfur campaign, which raised over \$1m (Sh135 million) in 2008 alone. As the study concluded, the page simply “conjured the illusion of activism rather than actually facilitating it”. As Tostevin concludes, it is quite simple to click, but just as easy to disengage.

Despite the attention paid to the Internet as a tool for civic engagement, Lewis, Gray and Meierhenrich (2014) say, there is still very little known regarding just how active the average online activist or how social networks really are in facilitating electronic protest. Also looking at the case of Save Darfur movement on Facebook, which had more than 1.2 million online members, the authors determine that only less than 2 per cent of those members attempted to recruit more people, and that an even smaller percentage made any effort to donate to the fund.

What the online movement did, the authors posit, was to give an illusion of an online campaign that was actually non-existent. Instead of facilitating the cause, the kind of “arm-chair” activism that users engaged in was potentially a failure as it did not meet the objectives for which it was created. It is this reality that led the authors to conclude that the concept of online activism is still a far-off reality whose time has not arrived.

The massive failure of that campaign – which one would expect to receive overwhelming attention and, therefore, success – highlights the shortcoming of technology-mediated activism as a medium for change, and points to the fact that the notion of online activism is overrated. This does not, however, mean that online activism is itself a failure; rather, it implies that it is either not well executed, its facilitators take it for granted that it will work, without putting real effort in it, or that it has simply been overrated.



## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will cover several sub-thematic areas on how the study will be carried out. This entails the research design to be used, data collection methods that will be used, and the analysis and presentation of data, among others. This study relied on primary data, which was obtained through questionnaires and focus group discussion questions, as well as secondary data derived from books and journal articles.

### **3.2 Research Design**

This study adopted a mixed method approach (qualitative and quantitative methods). It also employed an exploratory design to allow for collection of data through in-depth, informal discussions. The researcher settled for this design owing to its interactive nature, which facilitated the development of new insights into the research problem.

### **3.3 Area of research**

The researcher selected respondents from Nairobi area as the target sources were found within the city – universities from where student respondents were drawn, as well as media houses and various civil society movement groups.

### **3.4 Target Population**

The target population for this study included college students, media and civil society personalities. Students represent some of the most active users and consumers of social networking sites, while media and civil society personalities make up the opinion shapers of social media content, and therefore, constituted the requisite target population.

### **3.5 Sampling Design and Sample Size**

Purposive sampling was used to group respondents into four clusters made up of bloggers – because of the role they play in informing online discourse; discussions with media and civil society personalities – who use social media to profile their stories and set trends, and university students (Kenyatta and Nairobi), who make up a large chunk of social media consumers.

### **3.6 Data collection, procedure and tools**

The researcher collected primary data through questionnaires and focus group discussion questions with various respondents. The researcher also held non-structured discussions with different social media users.

#### **3.6.1. Questionnaires**

The questionnaires entailed both close and open-ended questions. The rationale for this method was informed by the fact that respondents are literate and able to respond to the questions on the basis of their experiences online.

#### **3.6.2 Focus group discussions/Unstructured interviews**

Focus group discussions were useful in capturing the perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of various stake holders towards the place of social media in activism, and augmented information gleaned from the questionnaires.

#### **3.6.3 Secondary Sources**

The secondary material for this research consisted of existing literature on social media trends in regard to activism, books by eminent scholars found in libraries of institutions of higher learning, and credible and verifiable Internet sources, which came in handy in the corroboration of the data gathered from the primary sources.

### **3.9 Data analysis processes**

Qualitative data was analysed using five standardised steps: documenting data and the processes of data collection, organising and categorising data into concepts, creating connections of data to indicate connections between concepts, corroborating data by evaluating alternative explanations, and representing the account of collected information (reporting the findings).

### **3.10 Challenges and problems encountered**

One problem the researcher encountered is that respondents gave too little data, or omitted some information. The researcher overcame this through administering detailed questionnaires to capture as much information as possible, including that which may have been lost or missed in focus group discussions. The researcher also corroborated information obtained through unstructured interviews and discussions with data from the questionnaires to overcome “moderator bias”.

Secondly, some respondents, especially media and civil society personalities, were available in person for the study owing to various commitments; the researcher mitigated this by submitting questionnaires and through e-mail to facilitate the discussion.

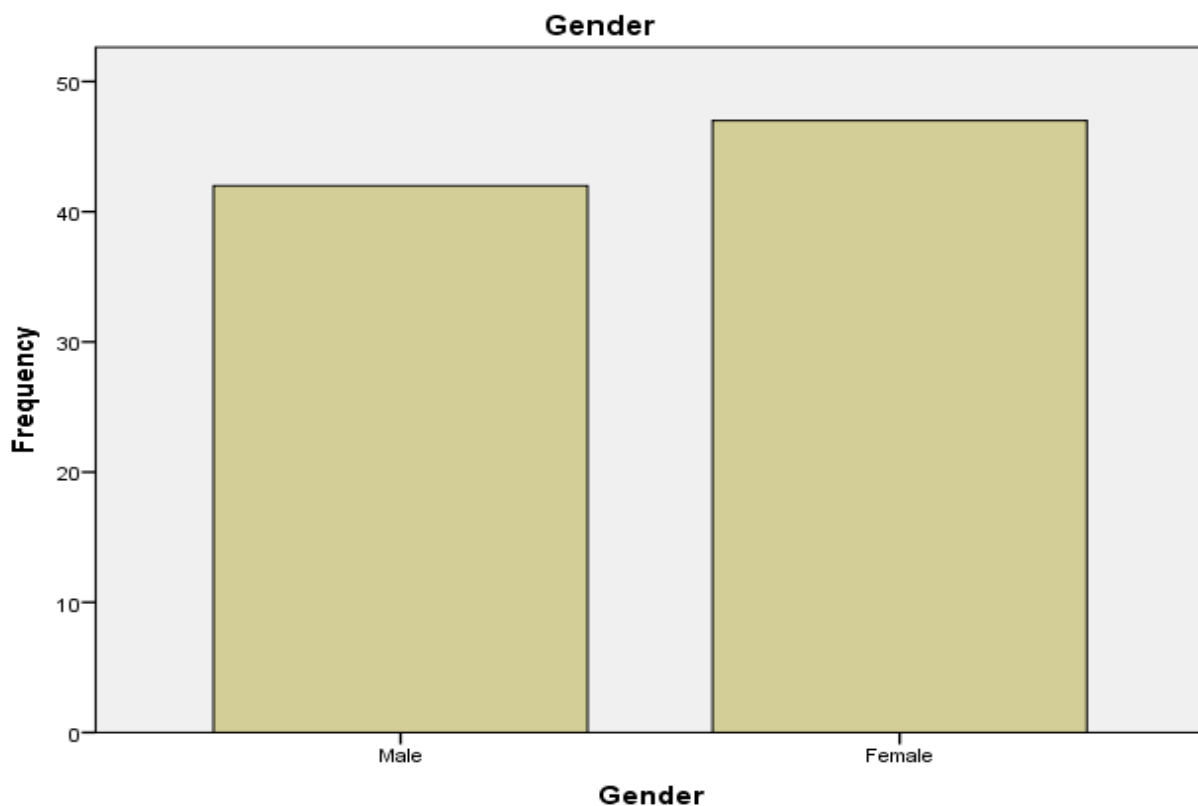
## Chapter Four: Data Presentation and Analysis

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the study and interpretations. Discussions of the results are presented viz-a-viz the objectives of the study. The sample consisted of eighty respondents who participated in the discussion and were also interviewed, for which the response rate was 100. Low response to certain questions was attributed to varied circumstance, such as respondents being in a hurry to leave to attend to other matters.

### 4.1 Respondent profiles

*Figure 1: Gender*



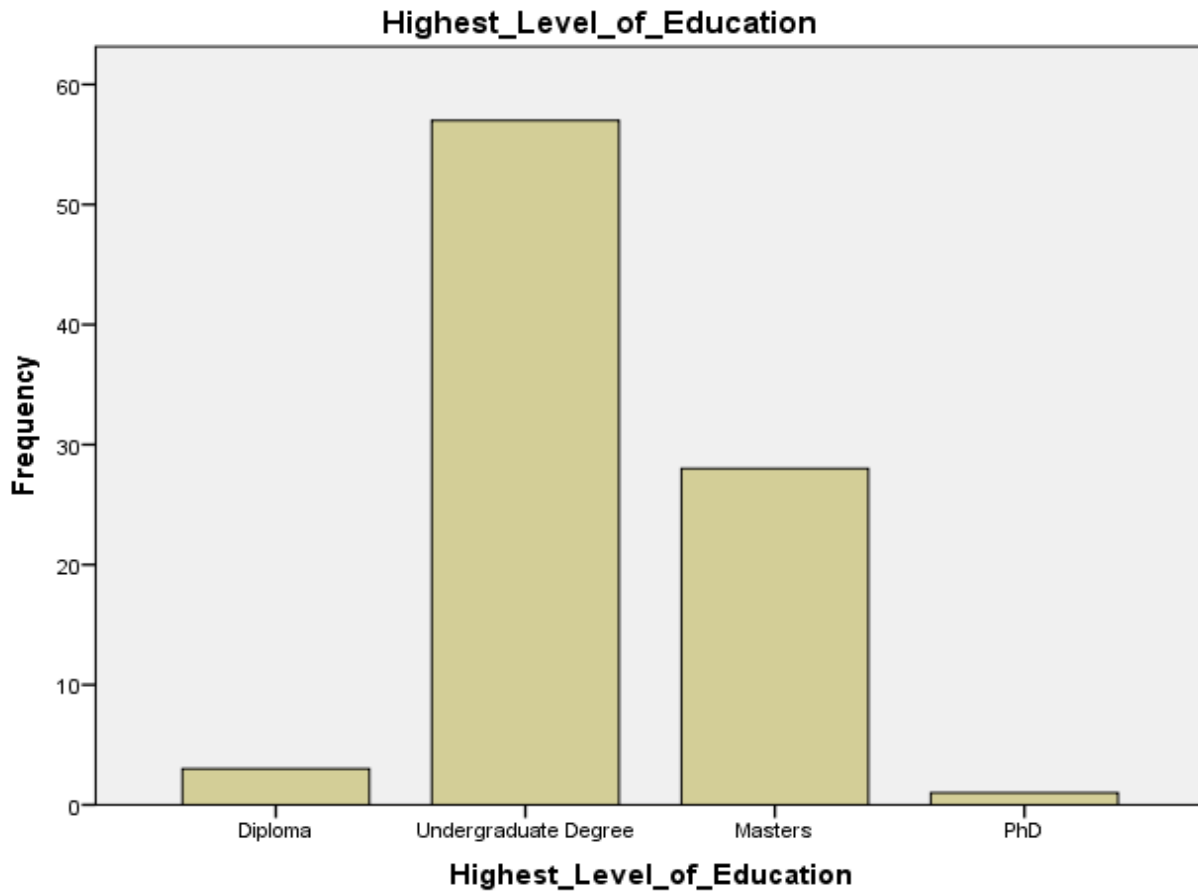
In the study, 47.2 per cent of the respondents were male and 52.8 per cent female; the majority of respondents were female as indicated below.

Figure 2: Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-23 Years	24	27.0	27.0	27.0
24-29 Years	53	59.6	59.6	86.5
30-34 Years	5	5.6	5.6	92.1
Over 35 Years	7	7.9	7.9	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

It was observed that 27.0 per cent of the respondents were between 18 and 23 years; 59.6 per cent were aged between 24 and 29; 5.6 per cent were aged between 30 and 34; and 7.9 per cent were over 35. Age was an important parameter because it demonstrated what category of Internet users is most active in activism-related activities, as it determines mobilisation and facilitation. From the study, the majority of social media users are in their mid twenties – the youth, who are also the people that most activists target because of their physical strength and agility.

Figure 3: Level of education



Respondents were asked to state their level of education and it was observed that 3.4 per cent were diploma holders/students, 64 per cent were undergraduate degree holders/students, 31.5 per cent were Masters holders and 1.1 per cent were PhD holders.

Although Harbemas (1989) argues that social class positions are irrelevant, and the connections between activists in the public sphere are formed through a mutual will to take part in matters that cut across society, another scholar, Fraser (1992), claims that the bourgeoisie public sphere has often discriminated against women and other historically marginalized groups, and that not everyone has access to the created publics. In this case, discrepancies in the educational achievements of actors were manifest in the way and manner of responding to Focus Group Discussion questions, as well as in the “intelligence of answers”.

Master and PhD holders were evidently more composed and gave better thought-out answers as compared to Diploma holders. This also played out in responses on responding to threads on Twitter, where a majority of respondents said they would be more inclined to retweet or comment on posts from people they consider learned.

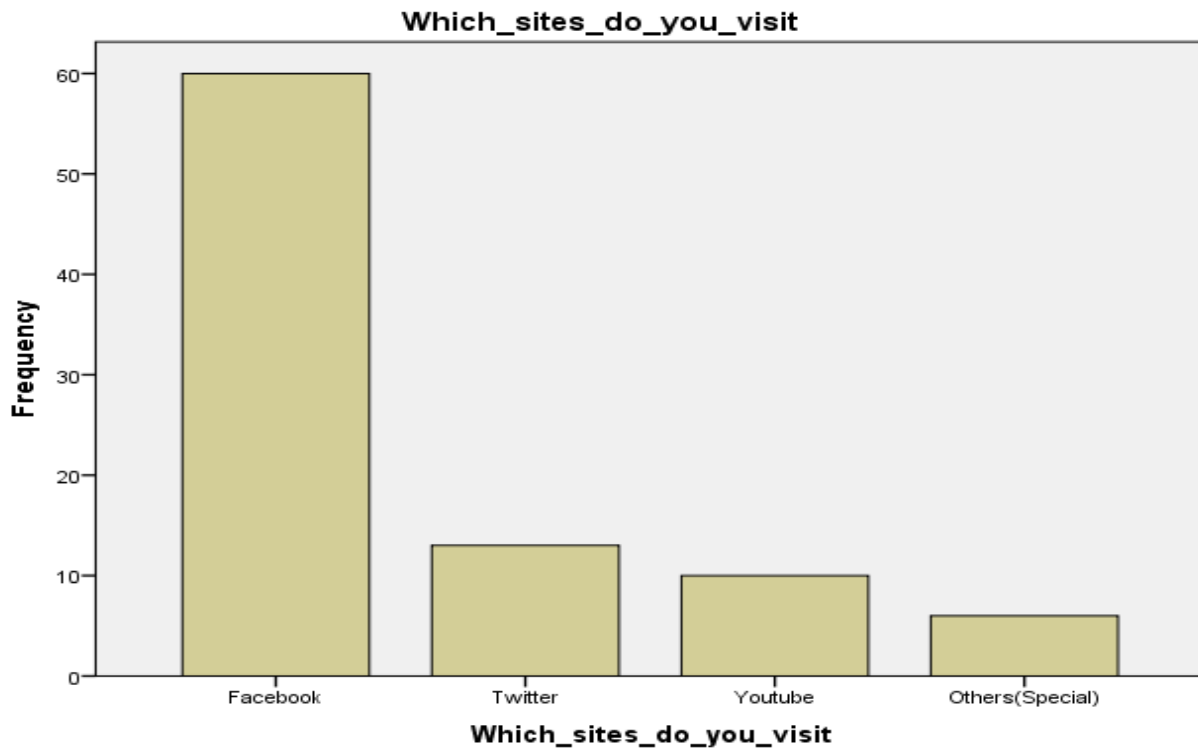
*Figure 4: Social media use*

**Those who use SNSs**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Yes	89	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

It was observed that all the respondents used Social media Networking sites. This concurs with the position taken by Rutledge (2014) that social media technologies have changed the psychological impact of communications by changing people’s expectations about participation, such that the ability to act, even if it is retweeting a post, allows users to feel a level of involvement in events they might not otherwise have done anything about. This creates engagement and emotional buy-in and well as a sense that individual actions matter.

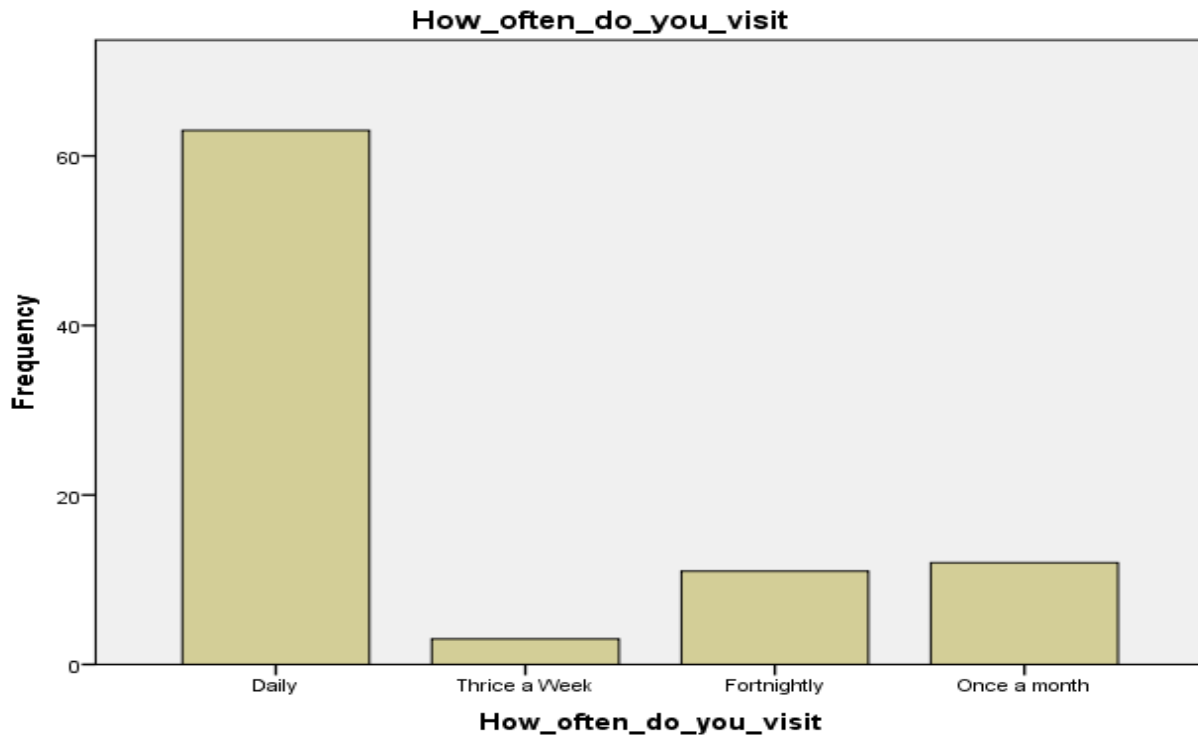
Figure 5: Most visited SNSs



When asked the sites respondent frequently visited, it was observed that a majority of respondents (67.4 per cent) visit Facebook, 14.6 per cent visit Twitter and 11.2 per cent preferred YouTube while 6.7 per cent frequently used other sites, which included blogs and the mobile phone application Whatsapp. Accordingly then, Facebook is the most popular site in Kenya, and is where one is likely to find the highest number of activism-oriented activities.



Figure 6: Frequency of Visiting Social Networking Sites



When asked how often the respondents visit the Social Networking Sites, it was observed that 70.8 per cent of the respondents visit on daily basis, 13.5 per cent visit once a month, 12.4 per cent visit fortnightly basis and 3.4 per cent visit thrice a week.

The question here is whether this Internet presence actually translates into online activism. Tostevin (2014), writing in *The Guardian*, argues that while online activism truly empowers those who already active, in most instances, it simply creates the illusion of activism, without actually empowering actors or facilitating change. This assertion is supported by evidence elsewhere in the study where it was observed that the majority of respondents do not always respond to posts, videos or tweets on activism.

Figure 7: Time spent on SNSs

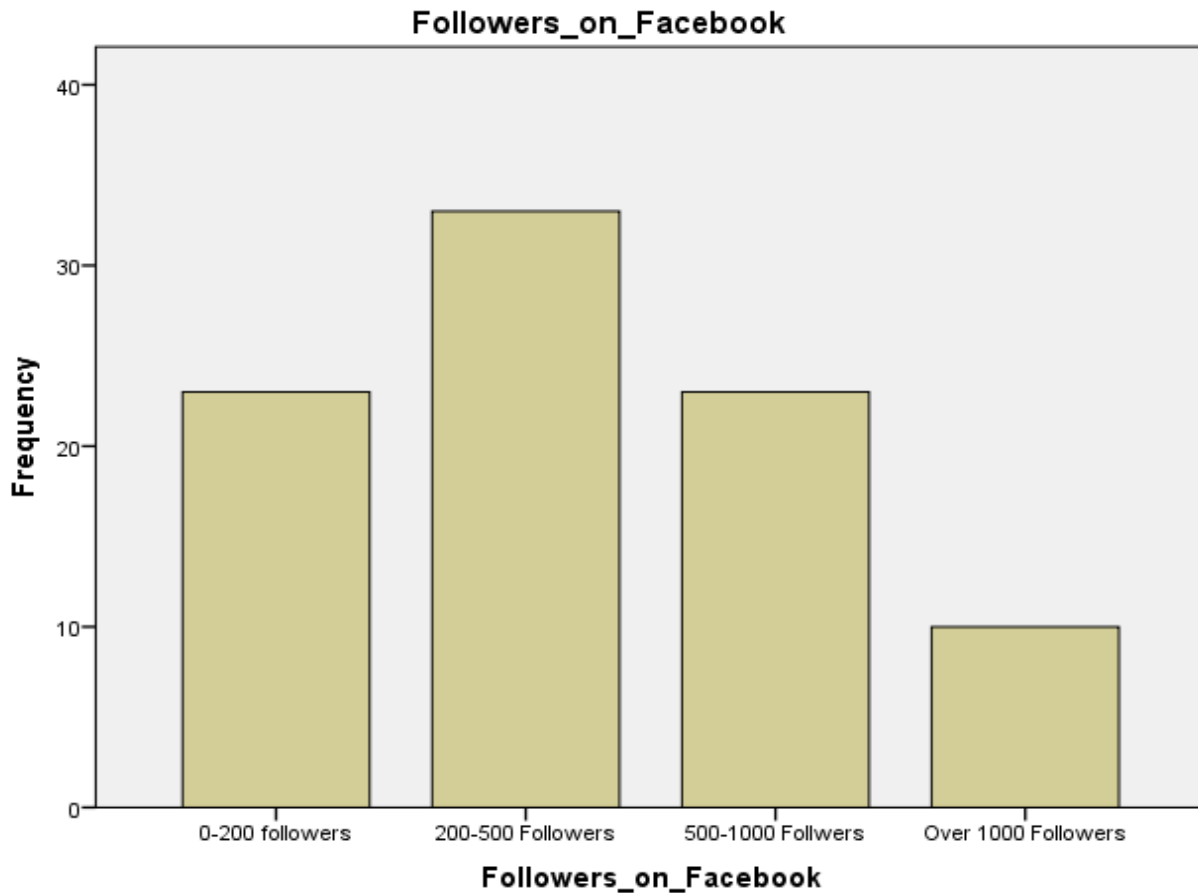
**Time spent on the SNSs during each visit**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Less than 30 minutes	49	55.1	55.1	55.1
30 minutes- 1 hour	26	29.2	29.2	84.3
One-2 Hours	11	12.4	12.4	96.6
More than five hours	3	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

In investigating the time spent on SNSs, it was observed that 55.1 per cent spend less than 30 minutes, 29.2 per cent spend between 30 minutes and one hour, 12.4 per cent spend between one and two hours and 3.4 per cent spend more than five hours.

Meierhenrich (2014) say, there is still very little known regarding just how active the average online activist or how social networks really are in facilitating electronic protest, and these figures provide a pointer as to how long the average user spends on SNSs.

Figure 8: Number of Facebook friends



On the number of followers users have on Facebook, it was observed that 25.8 per cent had between 0-200 followers, as well as those with between 500 and 1000 friends, 37.1 per cent had between 200 and 500 friends and 11.2 per cent had over 1000 friends

The implication here is that with over half of the respondents having between 200 and 1000 friends on Facebook, this medium presents an important avenue for mobilisation, especially given that Facebook allows users to share content with the “public” – that is, those with whom they are not friends. As Tostevin (2014) notes, through a study of social networking sites, seldom do those who ‘like’ pages or ‘share’ causes follow that up with a donation, for instance.

Figure 9: Followers on Twitter

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid	Cumulative
0-200	60	67.4	67.4	67.4
200-500	22	24.7	24.7	92.1
500-1000	7	7.9	7.9	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

It was observed that 67.4 per cent have between 0 and 200 followers, 24.7 per cent have between 200 and 500 followers, and 7.9 per cent have between 500-1000 followers.

Figure 10: Dependence on SNSs

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Highly dependent	7	7.9	7.9	7.9
Dependent	25	28.1	28.1	36.0
Somewhat dependent	31	34.8	34.8	70.8
Neither dependent nor independent	17	19.1	19.1	89.9
Not Dependent	9	10.1	10.1	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Respondents were asked to state their dependence on social networking sites, and it was observed that 7.9 per cent said they were highly dependent, 28.1 per cent were moderately dependent, 34.8 % were somewhat dependent, 19.1 per cent were neither dependent nor independent, and 10.1 per cent were not dependent.

This finding goes against a study by Storck (2011) who demonstrated that while possessing enormous potential to facilitate and expedite political mobilisation, SNSs are an inherently dialectical force that should not be treated as the ultimate liberators of society or as a force for coercing the masses. Here, the dependence on SNSs may be a mere illusion and may not adequately meet the civic and political informational needs of users.

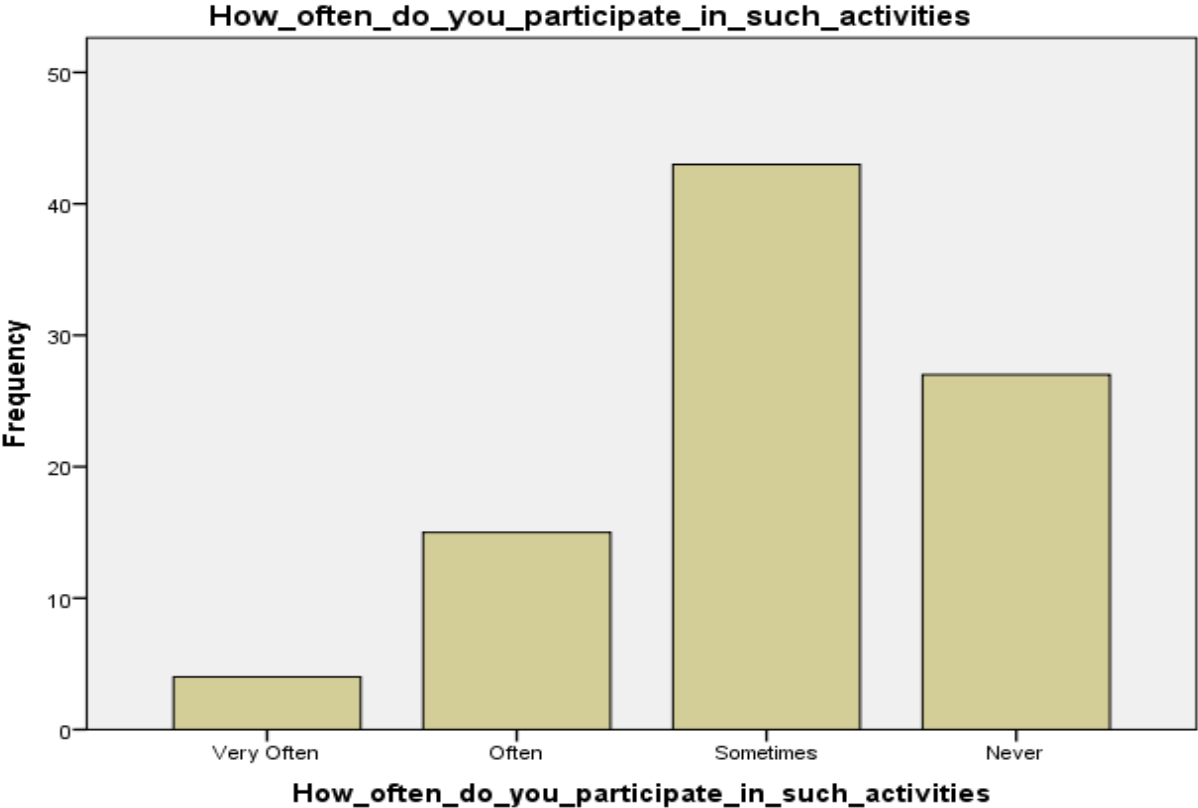
*Figure 11: Activism-oriented activities encountered*

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Petitions	16	18.0	18.0	18.0
Demonstrations/Protests	28	31.5	31.5	49.4
Branded T-shirts/Bands	13	14.6	14.6	64.0
Banners and Stickers	8	9.0	9.0	73.0
Boycotts	6	6.7	6.7	79.8
Graffiti	5	5.6	5.6	85.4
Mass mobilisation for a given cause	13	14.6	14.6	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

On the frequency with which respondents encounter activism-oriented material, it was observed that 5.5 per cent had encountered graffiti, 6.7 per cent had witnessed boycotts, 9.0 per cent had come across banners and stickers, 18.0 per cent had come across petitions, 14.6 per cent had come across branded t-Shirts/bands, or encountered mass mobilizations, and 31.5 per cent had encountered demonstrations/protests.

Accordingly then, the opportunities – on the basis of activism material encountered – for social activism abound. Making activism material available is the first step towards staging successful activism, and that these materials are to be found with ease both online and offline points to the fact that SNS consumers are likely to encounter activism often.

Figure 12: Participation



Respondents were asked to state whether they engage in activism activities, and it was observed that 4.5 per cent participate very often, 16.9 per cent participate often, 48.3 took part sometimes while 30.3 never participated. From the study, there seems to be some apathy towards activism activities, implying that the contribution of most SNS consumers to various causes is little.

This finding compliments another done by Gladwell (2010), who has questioned the effectiveness of social media to organise physical protest, arguing that the concept that every user of the Internet is "a participating member of human society" is simply misguided. Further, Lewis, Gray and Meierhenrich (2014) argue that there is still very little known regarding just how active online activists or networks really are in facilitating electronic protest, using the Save Darfur movement on Facebook, which had more than 1.2 million online members; the authors determine that only less than 2 per cent of those members attempted to recruit more people, and that an even smaller percentage made any effort to donate to the fund.

What the online movement do, the authors posit, is to give an illusion of an online campaign that is actually non-existent. Instead of facilitating the cause, the kind of “arm-chair” activism that users often engage in is a failure, leading them to conclude that the concept of online activism is still a far-off reality whose time has not arrived.

*Figure 13: Importance of SNSs as sources of information*

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Yes	75	84.3	84.3	84.3
No	14	15.7	15.7	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

From the study, it was observed that 84.3 per cent consider SNSs as important sources of information while 13.7 per cent did not.

The implication is here is that SNSs provide enough opportunities for activism on the strength of the number of users who trust information found online. This also is a form of endorsement for online opinion makers such as bloggers – that the information they give is often authenticated such that it inspires confidence among social media consumers.

It is also a pointer that SNS are increasingly replacing traditional media as the sole sources of information. This finding concurs with an assertion by Lievrow (2013), who posits that activists have used social media and information technologies to gain visibility and voice, to present alternative views or to “counter dominant media culture”.

*Figure 14: Encountering activism-oriented material (videos, blogs and/or tweets)*

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Yes	77	86.5	86.5	86.5
No	8	9.0	9.0	95.5
Do not know	4	4.5	4.5	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

On whether respondents had encountered activism-oriented material online, it was observed that 86.5 per cent had, 9.0 per cent had not and 4.5 per cent did not know.

What this implies is that while a majority understands the basic functioning of activism, a little number is still ignorant of this concept.



Figure 15: Frequency of encountering such material

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very Often	16	18.0	18.0	18.0
Often	46	51.7	51.7	69.7
Not so Often	19	21.3	21.3	91.0
Rarely	5	5.6	5.6	96.6
Never	3	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

It was observed that 18 per cent encounter such material very often, 51.7 per cent encounter it often, 21.3 per cent do not encounter it often, 5.6 per cent rarely encounter it and 3.4 per cent had never encountered any. What this implies is that it is difficult for technology-mediated activism to work if participants only show fleeting interest in an idea before moving on. From the study, it is clear that social media is replete with opportunities for activism but for various reasons – such as failure to feel a connection with the material being presented – Internet users often fail to recognise activism material.

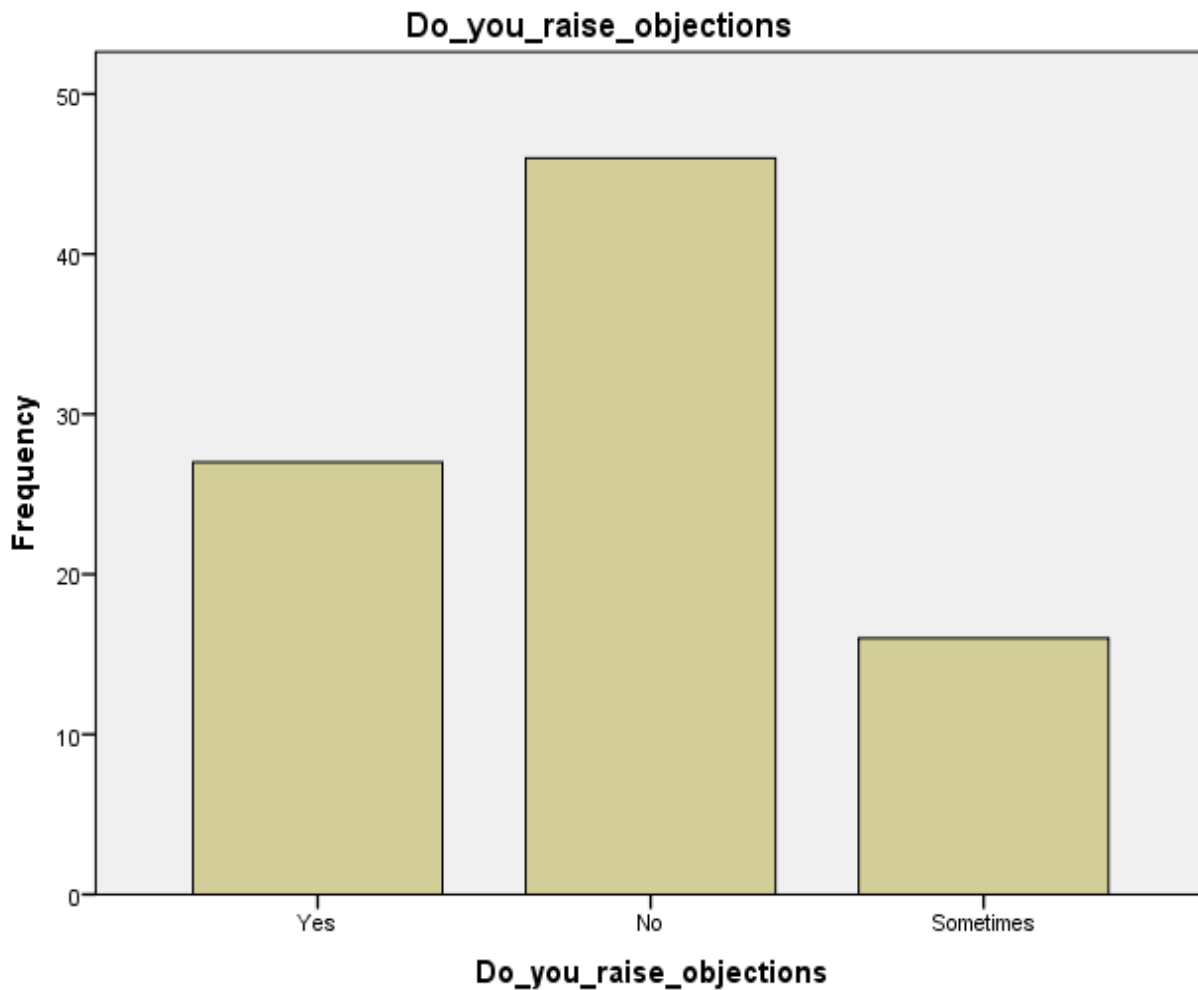
Figure 16: Frequency of sharing activism-oriented material

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Often	21	23.6	23.6	23.6
Often	29	32.6	32.6	56.2
Not so Often	39	43.8	43.8	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

From the responses, it was observed that 23.6 per cent share such material very often, 32.6 per cent share such material often and 43.8 per cent do not share such material.

Borrowing from a study by Lim and Golam (2011) who determined that if Internet users are unwilling to take part in an online protest, it would be even harder for them to agree to engage in a street protest which, essentially, is what it takes to induce change, online activism in the Kenyan context needs to be complemented by sustained efforts from an active civil movement to create change, or for activism to have an impact.

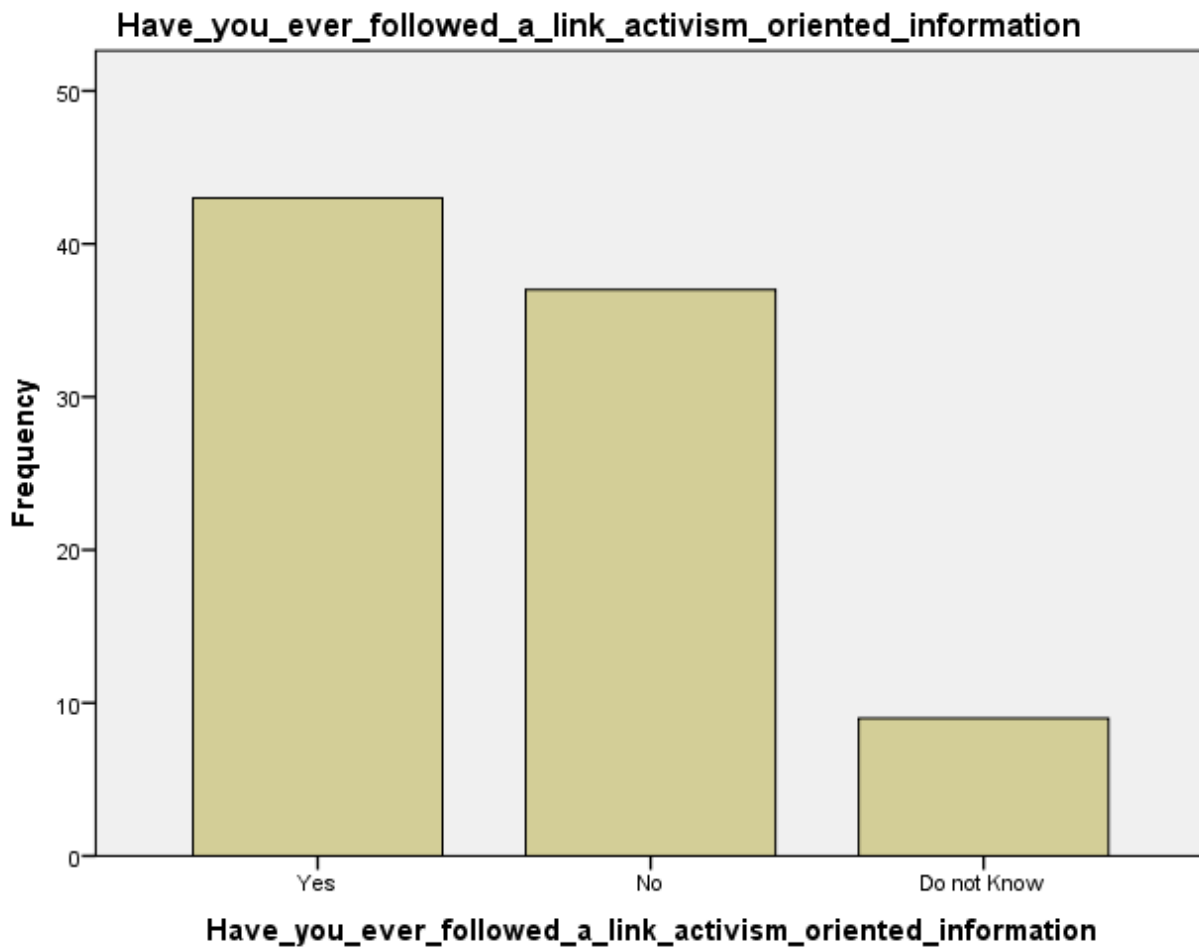
Figure 17: Expressing criticism



On whether respondents criticize activism-related activities with which they do not agree, it was observed that 30.3 per cent often criticize activism material, 18.0 per cent criticize on occasion while 51.7 per cent do not criticize.

The onus is on initiators of online activism campaigns to tailor their campaigns such that they do not border on the vulgar by dwelling on activities that incite or cause social media consumers to resort to insults.

Figure 18: Following activism-oriented links



When asked if the respondents have ever followed a link on activism-oriented information to blog post, or on YouTube, Face book or Twitter, it was observed that 48.3 per cent have, 41.6 per cent had not, and the remaining 10.1 per cent did not know.

Figure 19: Reaction to activism-oriented initiatives

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Block and or Report	4	4.5	4.5	4.5
Dislike	8	9.0	9.0	13.5
Unfriend/Unfollow	13	14.6	14.6	28.1
Ignore	52	58.4	58.4	86.5
Disagree without criticizing	12	13.5	13.5	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

The researcher wanted to know the steps the respondents take in case they do not agree with an activism initiative on a social networking site. 4.5 per cent block or report, 9.0 per cent said they dislike, 14.65 per cent said they unfollow/unfriend, 13.5 per cent said they often disagree without criticizing while 58.4 per cent said they ignore such posts.

This trend points to some form of apathy where social media consumers feel so detached and unconcerned as to not bother about such posts. According to Coleman (1988), in his criticism of the Social Capital Theory, this stems from the fact that individual and group aspirations do not often tally, such that what one considers important, the other may consider useless.

In essence, if a media user is not affected enough to want to contribute to an initiative – whether positively or negatively – that seeks to create change, then the approach or timing, or both, must be probed to determine why that is.

Figure 20: Sharing videos posts or blog links

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Often	7	7.9	7.9	7.9
Often	22	24.7	24.7	32.6
Not So Often	25	28.1	28.1	60.7
Rarely	21	23.6	23.6	84.3
Never	14	15.7	15.7	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

On respondents' willingness to share posts from other users and groups, or blog links, 7.9 per cent said they participate by sharing /liking videos, posts or blog links, 24.7 per cent often participate, 28.1 per cent participate sometimes, 23.6 per cent rarely participate and 15.7 per cent never participate.

The proportion of those who regularly take time to share links on activism or activism material is not very high. This finding tallies with an assertion by Papacharissi (2010) that citizens in contemporary nations suffer from civic apathy, public scepticism, disillusionment, and general disinterest in conventional political and civic processes. His justification is that there is no longer a public sphere that everything happens in the same domain, which affects people's commitment to causes – creates indifference to social and civic matters.

Figure 21: Posting activism-oriented links in SNSs

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very Often	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
Often	16	18.0	18.0	19.1
Not So Often	26	29.2	29.2	48.3
Rarely	22	24.7	24.7	73.0
Never	24	27.0	27.0	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

On posting activism-oriented links, it was observed that 1.1 per cent post links very often, 18.0 per cent post often, 29.2 per cent post once in a while, 24.7 per cent rarely post, and 27 per cent never post. Like in the case with sharing posted links, only about a third of the respondents admitted to having a keen interest in engaging in activism through personal initiative.

For the fledgling platform that online activism is, one way through which it can develop is if people take the initiative to identify civic and social matters that need attention and highlight them. This, from the study, does not happen often.

Meikle (2000) in a study to test the claim that actors in social media have successfully employed Internet as a tool of change to advance their causes, is sceptical about what he implies is an “an uncensored hype” about the possibilities of social activism which he thinks may be overrated. This finding qualifies Meikle’s concern that social media has not been utilised as fully as it ought to, for it to make a mark in serious activism.

Figure 22: Taking initiative to find activities geared towards activism

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very Often	3	3.4	3.4	3.4
Often	14	15.7	15.7	19.1
Not So Often	29	32.6	32.6	51.7
Rarely	14	15.7	15.7	67.4
Never	29	32.6	32.6	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

The respondents were asked to state whether they take the initiative to find activities geared towards activism. 3.4 per cent said they do take the initiative to find activism activities very often, 15.7 per cent said do so regularly, 32.6 per cent said they do so sometimes, 15.7 per cent said they rarely do and 32.6 per cent never do.

While it is evident that at least half of the respondents said they make some effort to find activism-oriented activities, more than half of these (32.6 per cent) admitted to doing so “once in a while”. This is hardly encouraging because, despite the hype about activism, it is clear that not enough is being done to develop the capacity of social media in activism. Even where the researchers Sherrod, Torney-Purta and Flanagan, (2010) agree that a majority of those engaged in online activism would rather sit in front of their computers and create and like/share pages online rather than engage in street protests, the target audience – the social media consumer – does not compliment that effort by finding out about such initiatives. Besides the fact that a large



number of social media consumers go online to socialise, it is telling that most are not really bothered about activism –online activism, for all intents, is not enough.

*Figure 23: Getting a sense of gratification from engaging in online activism*

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Very Gratified	14	15.7	15.7	15.7
Gratified	20	22.5	22.5	38.2
Somewhat Gratified	25	28.1	28.1	66.3
Not Gratified	16	18.0	18.0	84.3
Not Sure	14	15.7	15.7	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

The researcher wanted to understand if respondents get a sense of gratification after engaging in online activism. 15.7 per cent said they are often very gratified, 22.5 per cent said they become gratified, 28.1 per cent said they become somewhat gratified, 18.0 per cent said they do not find gratification and 15.7 per cent were not sure.

The dynamics here may not be as overt as the answers, but it is important to note that most of those who said they were very gratified qualified that gratification only happened in the campaign was a success, with some adding that online campaigns are rarely successful. According to Tostevin (2011), while online activism truly empowers those who already active, in most instances, it simply creates the illusion of activism, without actually empowering actors or facilitating change. She contends that the position of "armchair activism" is open to all, but while

making a difference seems quite easy in the digital age, one’s contribution does not often go deeper than a click. The author’s argument is that because of the feeling of detachment that digital activism is associated with – in the absence of physical interaction – users cannot feel satisfied for clicking “like” or “share”; there has to be a sense of involvement if activism is to have any meaning; this often lacks in online campaigns.

*Figure 24: Response to shared links*

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Yes	28	31.5	31.5	31.5
Sometimes	40	44.9	44.9	76.4
Never	13	14.6	14.6	91.0
Not Sure	8	9.0	9.0	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

On friends’ or followers’ responses to shared posts or links, it was observed that 31.5 per cent often share posts/links, 44.9 per cent sometimes do, 14.6 per cent never do and 9.0 per cent of respondents were not sure. Here, the response of friends/followers is quite impressive, attributed perhaps to the attachment between friends – most Facebook friends or followers on Twitter are also friends outside social media.

Figure 28: Capacity of online activism to create impact or influence change

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Yes	36	40.4	40.4	40.4
Sometimes	41	46.1	46.1	86.5
No	9	10.1	10.1	96.6
Not Sure	3	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Asked to say whether they thought online activism influences change, 40.4 per cent or respondents said they believe it does, 46.1 per cent said it sometimes does, 10.1 per cent believe it does not and 3.4 per cent were not sure.

The responses here were interesting given the apathy – from responses to earlier questions – respondents exhibited to, for example, taking the initiative to find activism-oriented material/links. However, as Lewis, Gray and Meierhenrich (2014) say, what online movements do is to give an illusion of a campaign, which is actually nonexistent. The authors look at the case of Save Darfur movement on Facebook, which had more than 1.2 million online members, but which the authors determine had only less than 2 per cent response rate from members.

The idea of an illusion could be true given that government agencies that are the target of some of these campaigns rarely, if ever, respond to matters raised, while individuals and companies targeted choose to let lawyers handle their cases and respond to allegations. An example cited by the respondents is the refusal by the Inspector General of Police and minister for Interior to step down following the terrorist attacks on the Westgate Mall in Kenya in 2013, despite immense pressure on social and mainstream (TV, radio and print) media. What the government did in

response to those demands – almost a year later – was to sack the chief of Intelligence, after yet another terrorist attack in a town on Kenya’s coast.

*Figure 29: Have you ever been persuaded to change your mind on the basis of information on social networking sites?*

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Yes	41	46.1	46.1	46.1
Sometimes	31	34.8	34.8	80.9
No	15	16.9	16.9	97.8
Not Sure	2	2.2	2.2	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

The researcher wanted to find out if the respondents had been persuaded at one point or more to their minds as a result of information posted on Social Networking Sites. It was observed that 46.1 per cent said they had been persuaded to change opinion, 34.8 per cent indicated they had, at times, been persuaded, 16.9 per cent said they had never been persuaded while 2.2 per cent were not sure.

This trend can be attributed to the persuasive power of social media which, Kim and Golan (2011) say mostly happens if an online protest or petition is initiated by an influential person, as opposed to an unknown person. From qualifying responses to their answers, respondents said they were more likely to change their mind about something if, say, a video on YouTube or a post on Facebook was posted by a person of influence, or an authority on the subject. Blogs and celebrity pages were mentioned frequently, with respondents attributing their views on a number

of issues, including whether or not Kenya needs to pull out of the Rome Statute that gives the International Criminal Court jurisdiction in Kenya.

*Table 30: Taking the initiative to find out instances of online activism*

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Yes	15	16.9	16.9	16.9
Sometimes	46	51.7	51.7	68.5
No	19	21.3	21.3	89.9
Not Sure	9	10.1	10.1	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

#### **4.2 Social network as important sources of information**

Respondents regard social networking sites as important sources of information on various strengths, which include the fact they deliver messages promptly and that they provide a platform for the free airing of ideas – they allow for networking while simultaneously bridging communication gaps.

SNSs are also considered important because they facilitate the creation of social awareness among online audiences, provide information about activism-oriented activities and enhance global communication through faster coordination and delivery of messages, connecting friends and influencing their circles, and giving users access to wide audiences at any given time.

### 4.3 Usefulness of Social Networking Sites in activism

Respondents justified the usefulness of SNSs in activism on the basis that Social Networking Sites allow for strategic planning in activism and offer a platform for agenda setting on various issues. SNSs also facilitate the critiquing and appraising of pressing social and political ideas through facilitating the mobilisation of support, easing the work of activists, through offering anonymity, which encourages activists to go online and express themselves, such that one can give one's opinion on a particular subject matter affecting society.

This finding corroborates studies by Lievrow (2013) who contends that people use new technologies to gain visibility and voice, to present alternative views or to “counter dominant media culture”, which they use to inform, warn, rebuke, correct and agitate for change. One respondent, and one of the most vocal activists in Kenya, Boniface Mwangi – he was the lead organiser of #OccupyParliament – had this to say:

“The usefulness of social media is not so much in its power, if it can be called that, to cause change, but in its capacity to reach to the masses and to create awareness, which enables even those who may never have taken part in activism, or who have no idea what it is, to take part... it is truly revolutionary.”

SNSs also provide an avenue for citizens to speak their minds and, for example, criticize government – made easy by the fact that it reaches a big online audience, as well as facilitate the dissemination of ideology – and the fact that it has an air of anonymity means that messages will seldom be exaggerated. This finding also tallies with a primary tenet of the Social Capital Theory, which posits that the spread of information technology creates networking infrastructure which encourages the formation of social capital (Calabrese and Borchert, 1996). Some respondents, however, disputed the importance of SNSs as useful tools for activism, attributing their responses to the fact that social media encourage the propagation of propaganda,

The implication here is that online social media movements act as catalysts for change; they play a big role in mobilising people – without them today, change will still occur but it may not have as big a reach or as much an impact as if SNSs were used.

On the same note, the majority respondents noted that change can still occur without SNSs but it will not be as effective as it would if social media was used to facilitate such activism. This concurs with the findings of a study done by Laer (2014) according to whom using digital communication channels likely extends, but at the same time narrows the mobilizing potential, to a public of experienced and well educated activists, and who are most likely linked to established organisations. It was, however, clear from the study that social media helps sets the agenda for activism. The implication here is that change can occur without SNSs but it would take a long time, especially if it required quick mobilisation. Respondents cited the case of the Arab Spring where SNSs were used to mobilise the people who staged the protests, concurring that SNSs facilitate communications, which is an important aspect of activism.

#### **4.4 Participation in social in social media activism**

Respondents said that they had all participated in social media activism. All respondents said they had volunteered in one way or another for an activism-oriented activity such as protesting, signing an online petition, wearing branded t-shirts or donating money; this, they said, was on a voluntary basis, to help sustain a human-interest cause.

At play here is Harbemas' concept of the "public sphere". Media, he says, attempts – and often succeeds – to manipulate and create a public where none exists, and to manufacture consensus. This is particularly evident in modern politics, with the rise of new mediums such as social media, and disciplines such as public relations (Harbemas 1989). Social media platforms have succeeded in creating an online citizenry which usually engages in activism.

Those who had participated in street protests said they had done so because it was the last viable option to disseminate their ideas. A majority concurred that the activity had been successful, particularly because the number of people involved was very large; those who said it had not been successful said that was so because the protest had turned chaotic. Citing the example of #OccupyParliament, respondents said an online campaign with similar tenor had failed to compel Kenyan MPs not to increase their salaries and allowances, but that had not borne fruit. This does not, however, mean, as Lewis, Gray and Meierhenrich (2014) assert, that online activism is itself

a failure; rather, it implies that it is either not well executed, its facilitators take it for granted that it will work, without putting real effort in it, or that it has simply been overrated.

#### **4.5 The relationship between offline and online activism**

A majority of respondents were in agreement that combining ‘offline’ and ‘online’ activism makes for more effective activism, as opposed to using one form. There was a general agreement that placing campaigns online gives them higher visibility as opposed to highlighting causes using traditional forms of protest, and thus makes them more effective.

According to the Social Capital Theory, the relationship between social capital and information technology is seen to be bidirectional, where high levels of social capital, such as strong non-electronic networks (offline relationships or personal networks), is a success factor in establishment of electronic-based networks (Fukuyama, 1995). It is this relationship that gives online activism its dynamism.

There was a general feeling that online activism ensures individual security and freedom of expression because of its anonymous nature, so that users can insult, demean and get vulgar under the guise of activism or “social responsibility”. This is supported by the Social Capital Theory, according to which the “anonymising effect” of information technology works against social capital – the said insults and vulgarity discourage rather than encourage participation (Kiesler, Siegel, and McGuire, 1991).

Respondents were, however, of the opinion that offline activism is more impactful because it provides for interpersonal communication and interaction between participants, and therefore personalises causes. They argued that online activists are ‘unwilling to get their hands dirty’ and that that what they post is forgotten as soon as one logs out. One respondent was of the opinion that online activists are ‘unwilling actors who want to be seen to be doing something but are, in essence, are not’.

Opinion was divided on whether online activism can replace offline activism. However, there was a general agreement that it is possible, and more sensible – with the digitisation of most human activities – to form online ‘masses’ on a need-basis around pressing issues. There was also agreement that the Internet is more effective in transmitting messages than are physical



means, such that it may no longer make sense to engage in offline activism. The other reason was that online activism has the distinct advantage of being unregulated. This means that anything can be disseminated, including material that would ordinarily be censored or not shown in mainstream media, which makes it easy to institute campaigns.

In support of this finding as an assertion by Marcotte (2012), who says that fears that the Internet discourages people from getting out in the world and having that critical face-to-face interaction that adds depth to activism are misplaced. According to her, one can create invitation chains on Facebook that will reach people that were unreachable before, and integrate them more readily into the community. The distinction between online and offline platforms, she argues, is collapsing to the point of meaninglessness, such that what is done offline is actually online activism. She justifies with the point that one can, for instance, send participants in a protest messages on Facebook or Twitter or even through e-mail, or find a big enough audience to convince through blog submissions and entries.

Those opposed to the idea that online can replace offline activism were of the opinion that online activism cannot bear any fruit without the efforts of offline activism. Citing the case of the Arab Spring, they said that the stalemate between government and the masses was not broken until people took to the streets and paralysed government operations. One response, in my opinion, captures the essence of this “collaboration” between online and offline forms:

“Activism is not a prescribe process, and there is no correct or incorrect way of being a social activist...”

Respondents also cited the case of #OccupyParliament where calls for MPs not to award themselves pay rises went unheeded until Kenyans demonstrated outside Parliament. Human interaction, they asserted, is an important tool in activism.

Respondents were also in agreement that it is important to have the established structures of offline activism, which can be depended upon to facilitate agitation for change, as opposed to relying on unpredictable impulsive online mobs whose cohesion cannot be trusted.

## **Chapter Five: Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary of the findings of the study, as well as conclusion gathered from analysis of the findings, in consideration to the objectives of the study.

### **5.2 Summary of findings**

The findings derived from the results of the study can be summarised as follows:

Most Internet users are aware of or have encountered social media activism. All of the respondents interviewed said they are on social media. This is an indicator that the digital divide in Kenya has shrunk, and continues to do so. From the findings of the study, 60 per cent of the respondents visit SNSs regularly, and 70 per cent of this proportion visit every day. Tied with this is that Kenya's young population is a stable online audience, based on responses on subscription to various SNSs, and the time spent on those sites.

Social media are becoming an increasingly important source of information; 84.3 per cent of respondents said they consider SNSs an important source of information. Most of those studied (34.8 per cent) indicated they were somewhat dependent on social media for information. Tied with this is that consumers of social media shape opinion on the basis of what online leaders say. For example, it was evident that certain bloggers and prominent personalities command huge followings, which share what they post with their online communities.

Demonstrations/protests are the leading forms of activism in Kenya, from the study, at 31.5 per cent. However, the probability that people will take part in street protests is not very high – 48.3 per cent of respondents admitted to taking part in protests or showed willingness to participate. It then follows that activism is shifting more towards online platforms; over 50 per cent of respondents admitted to sharing activism-oriented material that they encounter online. This has placed social media as a critical channel in activism. However, a majority of respondents said they prefer to employ traditional means in to criticise government or political leaders.

Following online activism is a bit of a challenge because it is a form that is still developing. Most of the time, activism-oriented material is ignored because people still do not understand the

concept of online activism – most mistake it for plain criticism. As well, users do not take the initiative to find out activities geared towards activism.

Consumers do not derive much gratification after engaging in online campaigns, a pointer still that this type of activism is not yet fully appreciated, either because people do not understand the concept, or because its impact is low. Sharing material and activities geared towards activism is essential to the success of activism initiatives, even as it is concurred that social networking sites play a critical role in disseminating such information.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

The role of SNSs in activism as determined from the study is largely that of facilitating offline activities, through disseminating information faster, mobilising actors and presenting information and facts that would otherwise be censored in traditional media. This qualifies the argument by Rutledge (2014) that social media has redefined activism by facilitating rather than decreasing advocacy, by lending voice to the hitherto “weak and unheard” – those who have been unable to take part in physical demonstrations now have a way to add their voices to causes.

From the study, it is evident that social networking sites do provide opportunities for activism in various social and governance issues. Social media is an indispensable tool for online activism on social matters and governance debates. Opportunities for engaging in activism online abound. But establishing a workable social media strategy, as the researcher found out, is about more than posting an update to inform or demand, and goes beyond relevancy or appeal; success is about being able to create and maintain a conversation with your audience. John Rampton, writing in Forbes, says: “If you’re not generating conversations or new subscribers, or making any money, then whatever you’re doing has failed.”

However, in the Kenyan context, it is not at that level where it can replace offline activism. This is informed by the fact that users do not derive much gratification from engaging in online activities of activism, which stems from the fact such activities may not have much impact in terms of realising change.

Properly then, the relationship between offline and online activism is a complimentary one, where the former benefits from the facilitation provided by the latter. Where McCaughey and

Ayers (2003) demonstrate that online activists have not only incorporated recent technology as a tool for change, that activism implies whatever form of agitation that a group of people happen to be doing, as long as it is geared towards change, and that any such group is a 'community' if it is united in a common cause, this study finds that local activism has some way to go before it gets to the state where social media activism can function on its own. But, as White (2013) puts it, digital media has, indeed, become "the twenty first century town square".

## **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher makes the following recommendations.

First, actors and organisations engaged in social activism ought to continue engaging in offline campaigns, using online platforms to facilitate offline activities. This should, however, be done with a view to establishing a robust relationship between the two platforms, even as it is conceded that the successes that have happened elsewhere can be replicated here.

Second, activists need to keep employing social media to reach wider audiences and to spread information much faster. This resonates with the assertion by Earl and Kimport (2011) that SNSs have the advantage of reducing the costs for creating, managing, and participating in protest, as well as decreasing or eliminating the need for activists to be physically together in order to make a cause successful.

Third, initiators of online activism campaigns need to align their activities such that they do not border on the vulgar by dwelling on activities that incite rather than encourage change. On the same breath, the strategies employed in online campaigns be tailored to resonate with the needs of target audiences; otherwise, users will keep shunning such attempts.

Fourth, online activists ought to be more engaged and proactive, such that they can be seen as active actors in their own campaigns. Part of the reason users lose interest is because whatever questions they may have regarding an initiative are ignored, and their informational needs addressed. Some participants gave part of what informs their willingness to take part in activism – like commenting on a post, sharing a video making a donation or reading a blog – is whether a campaign makes one feel 'included'; in other words, it should not seem or sound like a detached

activity that only calls for support from whoever is willing to take part. Accordingly then, creating a conversation – creating a feeling of inclusiveness – is important for some users.

### **5.5 Areas for further study**

1. Are there unintended negative effects through low-risk, low-cost technology-mediated participation? Should social media be taught in schools?
2. shift toward more decentralized forms of organizing and networking may help to ensure the sustainability of the #Occupy movements in a post-eviction phase

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## Appendix

### A. Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. Do you consider Social Networking Sites important? Why?
2. Does activism-oriented material interest you?
3. Do you think social media are useful for activism? Please explain.
4. What role do social media play in social movements? Can change still occur without them?
5. Have you taken part in social media activism? For example, have you ever signed an online petition to support a cause? Or Liked/Shared a Facebook page? Perhaps retweeted something on Twitter? Wrote a blog/post, or generally transmitted information about a cause you care about on social media?
6. Have you volunteered or donated money for a cause? Do you think it was worth it/successful?
7. Have you gone for a street protest? Do you think it was successful?
8. How do you compare online and offline activism? Which one, in your opinion is more effective?
9. Is involvement necessary in activism? Is online activism involving?
10. Are online activists unwilling to "get their hands dirty?"
11. Do the efforts required of participants actually achieve set goals? Is online activism a distraction at best from more important activities, or does it serve the purpose of activism?
12. Does online participation increase offline participation?
13. Does online activism replace or facilitate offline activism?

## B. Questionnaire

My name is Kevin Motaroki, a student at the University of Nairobi. Kindly take time to fill this questionnaire (By highlighting if filling it online or ticking if filling it manually) for a study I'm doing for my Master's in Communication project (at the School of Journalism). This study is significant as it will offer insights into technology-mediated participation in social and governance issues to qualify the hype around social networking sites as platforms for socio-political change

Any information you give will be treated confidentially and will be used only for the purposes of this project. Thank you.

### SECTION ONE: DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Please state your gender (Highlight or tick):

Male

Female

Age:

- i. 18 – 23 yrs    ii. 24 – 29 yrs    iii. 30 -34 yrs    iv. Over 35 yrs

2. What is your highest level of education? (Highlight or tick)

- i. Diploma    ii. Undergraduate degree    iii. Masters    iv. PhD

### SECTION TWO: ACCESS TO AND USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

3. Do you use Social Networking Sites?

- i. Yes  
ii. No

4. If yes, which sites do you visit? (Tick or highlight)

- i. Facebook  
ii. Twitter  
iii. YouTube  
iv. Google+  
v. Blogs  
vi. Other (specify)

5. How often do you visit the SNSs you use?

- i. Daily
  - ii. Thrice a week
  - iii. Once a week
  - iv. Fortnightly
  - v. Once a month
6. How much time, on average, do you spend on the SNSs during each visit?
- i. Less than 30 minutes
  - ii. 30 minutes – 1 hour
  - iii. One – Two hours
  - iv. Five hours
  - v. More than five hours
7. Approximately how many followers do you have on Twitter/ how many Facebook friends do you have?

	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Twitter</b>
<b>0 – 200</b>		
<b>200 – 500</b>		
<b>500 – 1000</b>		
<b>Over 1000</b>		

8. What is your major motivation for visiting/using SNSs? (List your reasons)
- i.
  - ii.
  - iii.
  - iv.
9. Would you say you are dependent on SNSs for information? Please tick as appropriate:
- i. Highly dependent
  - ii. Dependent
  - iii. Somewhat dependent

- iv. Neither dependent nor independent
- v. Not dependent
- vi. Don't know

### **SECTION THREE: ACTIVISM**

10. Which of the following activism-oriented material have you come across? (Highlight or tick)

- i. Petitions
- ii. Demonstrations/Protests
- iii. Branded t-shirts/bands
- iv. Banners and stickers
- v. Boycotts
- vi. Graffiti
- vii. Mobilising people for a cause

11. How often do you participate in such activities?

- i. Very often
- ii. Often
- iii. Sometimes
- iv. Never

12. In what ways can people use SNSs to create change?

13. What aspects/features of social media would be useful for activism?

#### SECTION FOUR: SOCIAL MEDIA AND ACTIVISM

14. Do you consider SNSs as important sites for obtaining information? (Tick/highlight)

- i. Yes
- ii. No
- iii. Don't know

15. Do you encounter activism-oriented material (Videos, blogs, posts and/or tweets)?

- i. Yes
- ii. No
- iii. Don't know

16. How often do you encounter such material?

- i. Very often
- ii. Often
- iii. Not so often
- iv. Rarely
- v. Never

17. How often do you share such material when you encounter it?

18. Do you raise objections or express criticism of government and public leaders on social media?

19. Have you ever followed a link on activism-oriented information to a blog post, or on YouTube, Facebook or Twitter?

- i. Yes
- ii. No
- iii. Don't know

20. How do you react to activism initiatives with which you do not agree?



- i. Block and/or report
- ii. Dislike
- iii. Unfriend/unfollow
- iv. Ignore
- v. Disagree without criticising

**SECTION FIVE: PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM**

21. How often do you participate in online activism – that is, through sharing videos and links, or posting information meant to influence or bring about change?

	<b>Very often</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Not so often</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>
<b>Sharing/Liking videos, posts or blog links</b>					
<b>Posting activism-oriented information</b>					
<b>Taking the initiative to find activities geared towards activism</b>					

22. Do you get a sense of gratification when you take part in online activism – through sharing or disseminating information, or making a contribution? (Tick or highlight)

- i. Very gratified
- ii. Gratified
- iii. Somewhat gratified
- iv. Not gratified

v. Not sure

23. How do people respond to your posts or shared links?

	Yes	Sometimes	Never	Not sure
Share				
Like				
Retweet/re-post				
Comment				

24. In your opinion, do online activism activities create impact or influence change? In other words, do they increase offline activism?

- i. Yes
- ii. Sometimes
- iii. No
- iv. Not sure

25. Have you ever been persuaded to change your mind about something on the basis of information you encountered on social networking sites – video, link or post?

- i. Yes
- ii. Sometimes
- iii. No
- iv. Not sure

26. Do you go out of your way to find out more about an instance of online activism? In other words, do you bother to get involved in a deeper sense?

- i. Yes
- ii. Sometimes
- iii. No
- iv. Indifferent