



**UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

**SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM**

**MASTERS OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES**

***SOCIAL MEDIA: THE NEW INTERPERSONAL BATTLEFIELD? THE  
TYPES AND LEVELS OF ONLINE INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS***

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*Research project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Masters of  
Arts Degree in Communication Studies at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication,  
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## DECLARATION

### Candidate

This research project is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any university.

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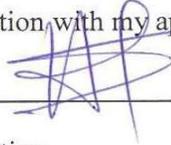
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May God bless you abundantly!

***DEDICATION***

*This work is dedicated to my parents.*

## **ABSTRACT**

Through technological advancement, there has emerged social media which has enabled people to connect in different ways based on different needs, such as the ways in which people engage interpersonally online in comparison to how they interact face-to-face. Social media has presented another avenue for people to express their feelings, views and opinions personally, and towards others, in positive and negative ways. The purpose of this study was to find out whether social media is a new battlefield for interpersonal conflict, and to find out the types and levels of online conflict. The objectives of the study are to establish ways in which social media is a ground for engagement in interpersonal conflict; to find out the various types of interpersonal conflicts that manifest through social media engagement; to establish the levels of interpersonal conflicts that take place through social media engagement and to find out the ideologies that (de)escalate interpersonal conflict on social media. The target population for this study was social media users, based on the number of connections they have established on Facebook and Twitter, as the most popular social media platforms. Purposive sampling was used to select the social media users who amounted to 65. The study also features 3 key informants who are professionals in the usage of the internet: social media officer, new media officer and a blogger. The research instruments included online questionnaires and key informant interviews. Data was analyzed and presented in a detailed manner on the various responses from the questionnaires and the interviews. The results of this study show that social media conflict does occur and is mainly instigated by different views of opinion, especially on political and religious fronts. The study also shows that there is need for a mechanism of regulation of what is posted online, by the various platform owners, the social media users themselves or non-governmental bodies, in order to have a means of online conflict resolution. Furthermore, the study revealed that there is the need for laws and policies to be formulated and implemented, as well as awareness creation on the possible retribution for grievous types of online conflict.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter focuses on the background of the study and problem statement, which indicates the phenomena that are being explored. Research objectives and questions, limitations and the scope of the study and its significance are also highlighted in this section. Finally, the operational definitions of various terms as used in the study are listed.

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Technology has advanced considerably over the past few years and it has enabled us to change how we perceive the world's means of communications, and even expression. Through this, new media has emerged. This advancement has given birth and rise to an internet phenomenon known as social media, which comprises of everything that has to do with the internet. Social media has increasingly become the go-to medium for not only information, but a wide variety of communication and relation among people. "It differs from conventional media in various ways such as in reach and usability; quality and permanence; and mostly, immediacy and permanence. Traditional media, in contrast, operates under a one-way communication model - from one informer to numerous recipients" (Haythornthwaite, 2005). In the early 2000s, as the broadband internet expanded, websites that allowed users to create and upload content began to emerge. "By the end of that millennium, social networking sites (SNS) were more accepted, with services acquiring a big number of users" (Broders, 2009). Various dynamics have furthered the increase of social media involvement: most are based in addition to an increase of broadband access, the development of powerful computers and mobile devices and enhancement of software means. "On a social note, younger age groups have also gained the ability to rapidly absorb social media and comparably, economic factors such as the cumulative affordability of computer hardware

and software, and growing commercial interest in social media sites" ("Publications du gouvernement du Canada," 2013).

Social media platforms have also made information and communication rapid, based on the different ways in which they are structured, to allow users to select their preferred means of receiving or sending out messages. "SNS have the functions of enabling users to come together through generation of personal profiles, where they are at liberty to invite friends, who will then have access to their profiles – they can then send emails and instant messages to one another" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). Facebook and Twitter, for example are the most widely used social media platforms due to the amount of traffic they generate, based on their accessibility and the service they offer. "Recent social networking sites focus more on the aspect of direct interaction by providing consumers an interaction realm where they at liberty to present themselves. MySpace, by 2005, reported that it attained more page visits than even Facebook and Google" ("JRC publications repository: Home," 2016).

"Facebook is defined as an SNS where people express their social networks and end up forming and sustaining links to others" (Ellison & Boyd, 2006). Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook has described it as a social utility that allows one to communicate more effectively with friends, family and coworkers.

On Facebook, users create personal profiles where they can put up not only photos and video as well keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues by sending messages. This platform includes a number of public features and is also available in various languages. Within these personal profiles, there are several key components, such as the Wall, which is easily the most popular. It is basically a bulletin board in the virtual realm that a member can post messages to another's Wall in text, video or photos. The most common profile feature however is the status

updates that allows a user to transmit short statements to their friends. All these exchanges are circulated in real-time, on a member's news feed.

"Twitter, another online social networking service, allows for the transmission of "tweets", which are short 140-character messages" ("Wikibooks," n.d.). Twitter members interact by sending tweets to each other through multiple platforms and devices. By default, Twitter is a public space and one can merge tweets into a thread or connect some tweets to a general topic. Tweets give the illusion of real time because they appear like instant messages especially to a novice user. Tweets are also searchable and permanent.

There are many other social media platforms, each with their own specifications and audience-need: LinkedIn is a business-oriented platform mainly used for professional networking; "Instagram offers online photo and video-sharing where users take pictures and videos, and disclose them either publicly or privately, directly or via other SNS" (Frommer, 2010); Google Inc coined Google+ (Google Plus) which is a platform that possesses the ability to group different types of relationships into Circles where one can post status updates, photos and instant messages. "It has video chat capability as well as a feature that allows the editing and uploading of media to remote cloud-based folders" (SimmondsLeadership & Coach, 2016).

This study will focus on the most popular SNS as Facebook and Twitter in order to find out the types and levels of online interpersonal connectivity, and eventually conflicts. These two sites are also more specifically driven by the need to share information and communication between and among people based on various types and levels of online interpersonal relationships that exist and/or occur.

Throughout all areas of society, the effect of social media on our ability to interact and communicate with one another is observed; it cuts across all venues and ages and affects how we engage with one another. "The style of that communication has changed, where even though face-to-face communication has decreased, people are becoming more interactive with one another" (Keller, 2013). People are more inclined to mediated communication, rather than face-to-face interaction, hence the shift in the way we communicate. Social media has made this increasingly easy, where networks of people are made available to users at their fingertips – meetings are reduced to e-mails and even phone-calls have been modified to text messaging. "Around the globe, this new method has affected interpersonal communication, with scholars proving that people spend less time talking to others based on the large amount of time that they spend on the internet" (Turnbull, 2010). As this should be seen as a positive element of bringing the human race closer, it is also through this online interaction that conflicts amongst one another can be bred due to many factors such as availability, anonymity, accessibility, response rate, etc.

An individual's sense of identity would also uncover the person's usage of social media platforms. The way we think about ourselves and the roles that we play in larger social environments is bound to generate the construct of identity portrayed through relationships and the social interactions we have with others. These characteristics are identifiable either physically, such as in race, ethnicity or gender; or they may be elective in the case of religion or political affiliation.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

"Billions of users across the globe using millions of computers has been made feasible through the massive and mechanical expansion of the internet" (Greenfield & Yan, 2006). New

experiences not foreseen by the original inventors of the web has been brought about through the combination of the growth of the internet and communication technology advancement. Social media has evolved the types and levels of interaction between different kinds of communicators based on the need and use of the platforms to pass messages.

"Relationships are assessed by the communication skills of others because communication essentially plays a central role in personal relationships" (Burlison, 2003), therefore interpersonal relationships are expressed in relation to interactions and the expectations that communicators have of one another. "Communication technology and its exponential increase is becoming a mainstay within our society with each generation, as recent studies have shown" (Mishna et al., 2009). This has in turn changed the dynamics of conflict among people. Social media has allowed people to vent not only personally but towards others, with the intent to cause rifts or commotion. It is perhaps now the most efficient way to raise disputes among people, and to fuel interpersonal conflicts.

Additionally, how we behave, what we believe, and who we associate with in the larger public environment can affect our roles in it, and how we see ourselves. Since advanced communication technologies and the information available online have the possibility to shape identity in meaningful ways, it is paramount to study the effect of identity complex and the role of online communication through social media use.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

This study explores how social media is contributing to conflict, as the new battlefield for interpersonal engagements. In studying the relation between the two, this research was guided by these objectives:

- i. To establish ways in which social media is a ground for engagement in interpersonal conflict;
- ii. To find out the various types of interpersonal conflicts that manifest through social media engagement;
- iii. To establish the levels of interpersonal conflicts that take place through social media engagement;
- iv. To find out the types of ideologies that (de)escalate interpersonal conflict on social media.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

To achieve the objectives stated above, the study takes to answer the following questions:

- i. What are the ways in which Facebook and Twitter are used as social media platforms to instigate interpersonal conflict?
- ii. Why do users engage in online conflict as opposed to ‘traditional’/offline confrontations?
- iii. What are the levels and most common types of online interpersonal conflicts?
- iv. What are the ideologies that perpetuate social media confrontations?

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study provides information that would help reveal social media as the new front of interpersonal conflict. It sheds light on the existence of conflict in these spaces, and shows the types and levels that exist. It also shares why people choose to use these platforms as an avenue for conflict, over traditional methods, and whether social media has provided for this ‘new’

aspect of interpersonal conflict. Its findings will hopefully generate debate on the ways to curb social media conflict, or inspire laws and/or limitations to be put in place towards online conflict resolution in this era of rising internet and new media use, and inspire further research on the subject. Moreover, this research will provide and supplement knowledge in the area under study.

### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

In order to investigate the types and levels of online interpersonal conflicts through social media, this study mainly focuses on Facebook and Twitter as the leading social media platforms in terms of usage. The two platforms are widely used across the world, and the number of users is rapidly increasing almost daily. The study also centered on social media users as they have first-hand experience in the use and exposure to social media platforms and content; it also featured key informants for an in-depth look at how social media is being used today, based on a professional view.

### **1.7 Assumptions of the Study**

The study was based on the following assumptions:

- i. Social media conflict is the new way in which people air their distaste for each other;
- ii. There are many types and levels of social media conflict than just cyberbullying and hate speech, with short term and long term effects;
- iii. Social media and traditional means of engagement are comparable when it comes to conflict (de)escalation.

## 1.8 Definitions of Significant Terms

**Social media** – Social media are computer-mediated tools that allow people or companies to create, share, or exchange information, career interests, ideas, and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks (Obar & Wildman, 2015).

**New media** – means of mass communication using digital technologies such as the Internet (“Google,” n.d.).

**Broadband** – a high-capacity transmission technique using a wide range of frequencies, which enables a large number of messages to be communicated simultaneously (Oxford, 2016).

**Software** - part of a computer system that consists of encoded information or computer instructions, in contrast to the physical hardware from which the system is built.

**Tweets** – a posting made on the social media website Twitter

Microblogging – a web service that allows the subscriber to broadcast short messages to other subscribers of the service.

**Hashtag** - A type of label or metadata tag used on social network and microblogging services which makes it easier for users to find messages with a specific theme or content. Users create and use hashtags by placing the hash character or pound sign (#) in front of a word or un-spaced phrase, either in the main text of a message or at the end. Searching for that hashtag will then present each message that has been tagged with it. A hashtag archive is consequently collected into a single stream under the same hashtag (Chang & Iyer, 2012).

**Handle** - Another word for a username. It can refer to the name one uses in chat rooms, web forums, and social media services.

**Meme** - a humorous image, video, piece of text, etc. that is copied (often with slight variations) and spread rapidly by internet users (“Google,” n.d.).

**Tweep** - a person who uses the Twitter online message service to send and receive tweets.

**SIM (Subscriber Identity Module or Subscriber Identification Module)** - An integrated circuit chip that is intended to securely store the international mobile subscriber identity (IMSI) number and its related key, which are used to identify and authenticate subscribers on mobile telephony devices (such as mobile phones and computers) (“Subscriber identity module,” 2016).

**Emoji** - a digital image that is added to a message in electronic communication in order to express a particular idea or feeling (Taggart, 2015).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter reviews relevant literature on social media, interpersonal relationships and personal identity; discussion of their relation and how the dynamics of technology has contributed to their mix, as well as the evolution of conflict generation through the engagement of people online as opposed to physical confrontations. It will also discuss different studies on online interpersonal relationships that have resulted to conflict situations, where users have exercised types and levels of various confrontations with other users with the aim of harming the latter. This chapter also analyses the public sphere theory, utilized in this study.

#### **2.1 Interpersonal Relationships, Identity & Ideologies**

"Interpersonal relationships are close and strong connections, ranging in duration, between two or more people, with an involvement based on different social commitments such as solidarity, economic interactions, love, etc" (Garst, 2016). They are formed on sociocultural as well as other influences, and their contexts may vary from, friendships, family relations, marriage and other social associations – neighbourhood or religious which can be regulated by customs and laws or by mutual agreement. These are the basics of the societal social groups.

Human beings are naturally social and are defined by their encounters with others. From the need to belong and transact social exchange, creates this innate motivation to interact with others.

Communication studies have opened up the processes of human communication whether verbal, written and/or nonverbal. This discipline incorporates a range of topics: face-to-face conversation to mass media outlets.

Social media offers new ways to present ourselves while connecting with one another, incorporating activities that define identity formation and expression. Erving Goffman (1959)

expands understanding of the intentional and unintentional identity signals we share with others through his work on self-presentation. He states that the process is influenced by the way we perceive ourselves vis a vis by others. "We must always act differently in different settings since the society is not homogeneous" (Goffman, 1959). People set a "front stage," when they are in public settings and are trying to impart a particular or fake impression to viewers, like an actor on stage presenting a performance. "Comparably, there is also a backstage where individuals can be themselves and drop their societal roles and identities in this hidden and private area" (Ritzer, 2008).

Social media offer new opportunities for stepping out of character, in the back stage. One such form is through personal online 'attacks' on someone with whom one would not attack on the "front stage". This is representative of a mask that the attacker wears in order to perpetuate the confrontation, that social media provides.

Due to the fact that individuals have more control over the messages they send out, caused by the ease of online communication via social media channels, it complicates identity processes where users share with others. Many identity cues that are often difficult to conceal face-to-face, are masked or misrepresented in online contexts. It is much easier to engage with others online than in person. Some individuals tend to want to create negative confrontations (based on a range of topics such as religion, politics, ethnicity, etc.) and will therefore operate consistently in line with this goal. Where they take advantage of the occasions offered by web-based communication to follow through. Selective self-presentation also has consequences over how we tend to perceive ourselves. In online settings, individuals select the impressions they would want to pass along by withholding positive disclosures (if any) and sharing those that are negative.

Furthermore, the ability to denote negative online presentations can have repercussions for self-esteem and self-concept, therefore spurring conflict with others.

Social media is not a neutral space, it is designed for numerous ideological purposes which could be to bring people together, sell them things, collect data, etc. "Or, more enticingly, is it designed to give the illusion of bringing people together, to achieve any or more of the purposes mentioned.

It is useful to think through the politics if we are going to use it since all technology is political. It will assist in control where individuals may not be manipulated by perceptive design elements. For example, the politics of Facebook is that it is classically liberal in that it gives a platform for free speech thereby favouring the free market" (Pantland & Sipp, 2014).

## **2.2 Social Media Usage**

"Just like a contemporary classroom, social media has certainly become an important part of industries such as advertising and public relations, and other numerous aspects of our daily being" (Al-Deen and Hendricks, 2011). Social media platforms have grown to a mass online activity from a basic function, where millions of internet users are engaged in their leisure and business.

It can be said that the first social media platform emerged ten years ago when the basic sites focused on linkages with former schoolmates, for instance Classmates.com from 1995, and dating sites. After that, many other different companies have attempted to replicate the structure of the major successful SNS. "Though some platforms appear to be alike, many are quite different by function and the communities of users they interest" (Communities, 2015).

The diversity in the social networking sites has continued to be observed in the topics covered such as technology, fashion, food, health, human rights, environment and governments. The

expansion of use of social media in Kenya in depth on topics of choice and diversity have, in the last 5 years elicited interest from the "Kenyan corporate sector with brands seeking to work with users as an additional platform for advertising and marketing through banner advertisements, commissioned product reviews, promoted blog posts and social media campaigns" (BAKE, 2015).

Access to social networks has also increased the usage of the various platforms for one need over another. According to a 2014 study by Frost & Sullivan, Africa's mobile phone saturation is expected to rise by 79% by 2020. In sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya comes across as a country with the highest smart phone growth rate and internet penetration rate. The report states that internet subscriptions grew by more than 10% to reach over 16 million subscriptions from the 14 million reported in the last quarter. "Numerous data promotions that are carried out by various service providers, such as offering free social media access by post-paid and prepaid subscribers on their network can be tied to the growth in internet access and usage" (Muema, Mwende, Nkirote, & Macharia, 2016). According to writer Fernando (2011) "some of the common uses of social media are: "Communication – Through using applications such as blogs like *WordPress*, or websites where one can create articles which visitors can comment on, and SNS like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, or *LinkedIn* where people comment, share personal details and media, or establish relationships with other users; Collaboration – where many people simultaneously update and view an online encyclopedia, such as *Wikipedia* and *Dropbox* allows people to upload or download files from a central 'folder' which multiple people can access from a range of devices; Brand Monitoring – that enable one to read and summarize what is being said on the web and social media about particular brands, people, and products against defined keywords, and respond to, but also analyze trends, campaigns and competitors such as *Brandwatch* and *Radian*

6; Entertainment – where games now heavily rely on this in order to retain and monetize players. Facebook utilized Farmville and Mafia Wars by [Zynga](#) for exposure as well as player interaction as integral to the game; Media Sharing – allowing to upload and view videos and being able to create channels, add comments and connect with different users such as *YouTube* and *Vimeo*. *Spotify* allows people to share playlists and musical tastes. Photo sharing services with social features include *Flickr*, *Picasa* and *Pinterest*.” (Fernando, 2016)

Social media touches on many diverse areas. We use not only to stay up-to-date with news and current events but as well as to stay in touch with what friends are doing, and to share details of our everyday life, to find entertaining content, to share opinions and media with others, for general networking with other people, to fill up spare time or to meet new people. Whatever the needs are, social media extends across an increasing number of areas and therefore, we can anticipate more use of social media characteristics and abilities in the coming and near future.

## **2.3 Social Media Platforms**

A social media platform displays a social network site’s user-specific and technological characteristics. It offers the capacity to create social media websites and services with complete social media network functionality. For the purposes of this study, Facebook and Twitter shall be explored as the most popular social media platforms in terms of usage and/or traffic, with WhatsApp and Snapchat being defined for comparative purposes.

### **2.3.1 Facebook**

Facebook, launched in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and his Harvard College roommates was initially limited in membership to Harvard students, but later expanded it to higher education institutions. It then progressively allowed students from other universities to onboard, then later

high school students. "As of 2006, depending on applicable local laws, individuals older than 13 have been allowed registration to the website" (Facebook, 2015).

On registration, user profiles allow one to add other users as "friends" to exchange messages and post status updates, and share media. They can also use various apps to receive notifications when others update their profiles. Additionally, these users can identify common-interest and develop groups either organized by workplace, school, or other characteristics; one may also categorize their friends into lists. An incredible function of a centralized newsfeed, Facebook keeps track of what users in your networks are doing.

Arguably, the simple and ordered profiles mark a major attribute of Facebook's success, which is not the case on most other online networking sites; such as restrictive profile design offering a uniform interface to all members making it is easy to look for things in other users' profiles.

Having a Facebook account is now a probable part of being online for a majority of internet users comparable to having your own email address. Other websites have worked to integrate Facebook due to its popularity, offering that one can use a single Facebook account to sign in to diverse services across the internet.

Things posted on Facebook are more public than on email or instant messaging - which are relatively private. This means that posts that are put up will usually be seen by many others. The site is designed to be more open and social than traditional communication tools, although it also offers privacy tools to help limit who can see the things you share.

### **2.3.2 Twitter**

Accessible through the web, SMS or mobile device application, Twitter is an online social networking service that enables users to publish short 140-character messages called "tweets".

These users can read and post tweets and those who are unregistered can only read them. It was created in March 2006 by Jack Dorsey and his business partners but launched in July 2006. "By March 2016, Twitter had more than 300 million monthly active users" (Twitter, 2016).

Twitter's big appeal is how rapid it is as it happens in real time and about relaying short messages to the world, with the hope that your messages are useful and interesting to someone. To receive Twitter feeds, one can simply 'follow' someone interesting and subscribe to their tweet microblogs. To weave tweets into a conversation thread or connect them to a general topic, members can add hashtags to a keyword in their post. Anyone can follow anyone on public Twitter.

According to a recent report published by Kenyan technology writer and industry expert Moses Kemibaro (2014), Kenya has a verified more than 700,000 active users monthly on Twitter.

### **2.3.3 WhatsApp**

In 2009, WhatsApp Inc. was founded by former employees of Yahoo! It is a cross-platform, instant messaging platform for smartphones (Metz, 2016) that uses the internet to send text messages and other media to users using their standard mobile numbers. "One billion users of WhatsApp were recorded as of February 2016, making it the most popular messaging application" (Sun, 2015). The firm is based in California, United States and was since acquired by Facebook Inc. in 2014.

"It creates a user account using one's phone number as the username upon installation and then automatically compares all the phone numbers from the mobile device's address book to automatically add contacts to the user's WhatsApp contact list. Multimedia messages are sent by

uploading the image, audio or video to be sent to an HTTP server and then sending a link to the content" (Venomous, 2012).

### **2.3.4 Snapchat**

Headquartered California, USA, Snapchat is an image messaging and multimedia mobile application created by students at Stanford University. It has evolved into a mix of private messaging, photo-sharing and public content, including brand networks, publications, and live events such as sports and music.

"Snapchat is primarily used for creating multimedia messages referred to as "snaps" which can consist of a photo or a short video which can be edited to include filters and effects, text captions, and drawings" (Alba, 2016). Friends are added via usernames and phone contacts, using customizable "Snapcodes". Snaps can be directed privately to selected contacts, or to a semi-public "Story" (Etherington, 2013). In contrast to other messaging apps, Snapchat's messaging functions are considered to be "conversational," rather than "transactional," as they sought to replicate the conversations engaged in with friends (Hamburger, 2014)

## **2.4 The Public Sphere Theory**

New media has allowed people to promptly consider new communication areas and has classified arenas as 'spheres'; with the quick growth of the internet, it would bid justice to refer to Jürgen Habermas' traditional model of the 'public sphere', which has been the basic area of study of the open space of communication.

In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas, Burgher, Lawrence, & Burger, 1991), Habermas, a German philosopher and sociologist, described the public sphere as "a place where the private middle-class come together and form a public to discuss, engage in

critical rational debate and form a public opinion. The public sphere is made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state" Habermas, 1989. p.176). This comprised a study of promotion that was initiated in the eighteenth century though maintains modern relevance which draws it past from the divide between public and private.

In the eighteenth century, catalyzed by economic developments in Great Britain, Germany and France, the elites who formed a public, would meet official meeting places such as salons to debate critically on issues such as art for example, away from disclosure. This grouping mainly shared goals on what they thought was important in to the decision making processes to the officials of the state. To add on, the 18th century invoked discussions which ultimately were recognized within the European middle-class statutory kingdoms. The public sphere was therefore important to generate critical discourse that influenced political actions of the state. Through these aspects of coming together to talk, the public sphere created notions that offered to institute or contest the running of affairs. Ideally, the public sphere is the origin of civic opinion that was needed to "legitimate authority in any functioning democracy" (Rutherford, 2000).

"As ethnic, gender, and class prohibitions were done away with through the 19th and 20th centuries, and the public sphere approached its ideal more closely. Habermas uncovered a coexisting form of the public sphere through the advance of social welfare, the growth of culture industries, and the evolution of large private interests. For example, large newspapers devoted to profit, turned the press into an agent of manipulation: It became the gate through which privileged private interests invaded the public sphere" (185).

Habermas stresses that "if something is public it is open to all. The public sphere would therefore require media for information and communication and access by all citizens. This has sparked criticism where people argue that the public sphere, a place for pure rational independent debate, never really existed. The 'public' will never be accessible to 'everyone'".

"The middle-class's public sphere in its existing form wasn't permanent, as the state and society became more merged over time but the concept of the public sphere still remains a relevant paradigm when looking at new digital spheres where people come together. Almost since the advent of the internet there has been great interest in analyzing and understanding online communication from the perspective of the public sphere theory" (Dahlberg, 1998; Keane, 1995; Sunstein, 1995). The internet web has some interesting likenesses to Habermas' concept of the public sphere, "as a public place that's outside the control of the state, and allows individuals to exchange views and knowledge, and also permit individuals to share critical points of view, and finally as a space where public-minded rational understanding can be developed". The internet acts as a public sphere where "contemporary critical discourse can rapidly emerge and influence political action. Social media has marked an era where we can all use our voices to reach the online public with our views and knowledge and thereby engage in contemporary dialogues, which might eventually influence political action". The conception of Habermas' public sphere is perceived maybe as out-of-date, but it surely has left its mark in new media domains like the internet.

## **2.5 Online Interpersonal Conflict**

The internet can now somewhat be compared to the proverbial 'public sphere'; where people come together to dialogue over various topics and air various concerns. This space has allowed for vast sharing of information amongst people from very diverse and expanding groups. It is

inevitable therefore that within these online gatherings, there will be different forms of conflict displayed. Not only of opinion, but of other representations such as bullying, invasion of privacy, identity theft, violence etc. Generally, conflict would ascend either out of opposing personalities amongst users or user's contact to common difficulties associated with the use of social media.

Social media users may be more likely to engage in online conflict when they feel that their expectations aren't met or when they don't match up with other users' prospects. The overriding example of this kind of conflict arises where social media users display a diversity of perspectives therefore, more often than not there are clashes in the online engagement realm. Some users may have differing principles and/or mismatching values dependent on the attraction the various platforms. Another mild form of conflict that may arise is where users display a lack of focus in terms of the platforms they use, or what messages they intend to send out; this can also present disagreements in the perception of the strategy or execution of social media platforms from one user to another.

There are also various personal cues that elicit forms of online conflict. Things such as one's limitations of reading and writing capabilities where some users are "less literate, or less careful about how they write or making sure they understand the message they are responding to than others; some may have steadfast opinions where they decide their personal positions in a debate and are incapable of being flexible to other's thoughts. There are also a number of users who do not make differing sets of values clear enough for productive discussions to take place in the internets. Additionally, it can be as simple as the demonstration of patronizing, demeaning or condescending language being used in online engagements ".

Sometimes, the environment in which users engage can inspire conflict based not only on interpersonal levels but also in the way communication tools are misused (and/or interpreted).

For instance, in online engagement there are no physical communication cues therefore the lack of non-verbal visual gestures can generate conflict where there is improper identification between users say, mood and tone. And as such, there begs the question whether users lose their inhibitions online, based on the impersonality of social media platforms, saying things that they would not normally say face-to-face. Another concept that cannot be ignored, although small is the misinterpretation of silence among users caused by the time delay in-between responses which can ultimately blow issues out of proportion. Additionally, some social media users may have differing understandings of the perceptions of public vs. private spaces online. This slight difference in what content is shared and what is not, may cause different users to react in different ways, in which, more often than not will be negatively.

Over time, underlying emotional issues may also develop among social media users which will determine how they engage with others, for example: chronological predicaments where certain users may have had previous personal arguments which now affects their ongoing online interactions; some users may display personal prejudices when they come across other particular users and/or online content. The perception of injustice where some users generally normally complain of being persecuted by other elements – such as based on gender, age, sex, political affiliation; this is often the ultimate showcase of online interpersonal conflict that manifests on Facebook and Twitter, second to the display of power dynamics where some users are vying for supremacy and control over others. Although not totally exhaustive, other causes of interpersonal online conflict "could be related to jealousy, revenge, abuse of authority, rudeness, the victim complex, lack of trust, passive-aggressiveness, or simply people's desire to be "right" ".

## **2.6 Types and Levels of Online Interpersonal Conflict**

### **2.6.1 Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is unwanted and/or aggressive behavior of a person towards another that takes place through the use of electronic devices or "equipment such as cell phones, computers, and tablets as well as through communication tools like social media sites, text messages and websites. Examples of what constitutes cyberbullying include communications that seek to intimidate, control, manipulate, put down, falsely discredit, or humiliate the recipient. The actions are deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior intended to harm another" ("Cyberbullying," 2016).

"Cyberbullying can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; any time of the day or night". It can even reach users when they are alone. People who are being cyberbullied may normally also be bullied in person as well.

The intricacy of cyberbullying media is that they "can be posted anonymously and distributed quickly to a very wide audience" and it is often "difficult and sometimes impossible to trace the source. Subsequently, deleting inappropriate or harassing messages, texts, and pictures is extremely difficult after they have been posted or sent".

Cyberbullying normally can occur on SNS such as Facebook or Twitter. According to a 2013 Pew Research study, "eight out of 10 teens who use social media share more information about themselves than they have in the past. This includes location, images, and contact information" (Madden, et al., 2013)

### 2.6.2 Hate Speech

"Hate speech, outside the law, is speech that attacks a person or group on the basis of attributes such as gender, ethnic origin, religion, race, disability, or sexual orientation" (Nockleby, 2000).

"Hate speech can be any speech, gesture or conduct, writing, or display which is forbidden because it incites violence or prejudicial action against or by a protected individual or group, or because it disparages or intimidates a protected individual or group".

Social media is the biggest platform where various forms of hate speech take place. A website that uses hate speech is called a hate site. Users utilize the power of the keyboard for the wrong reasons and much of the hate speech arises from ethnic and political affiliations.

In Kenya, the laws on hate speech tie to the freedom of expression. Under Article 33 (2) subsection (c) of the Constitution it states "that the right to freedom of expression does not extend to hate speech". The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) Act further extends the definition of hate speech in Section 13 which forms the basis of a more impressive explanation for hate speech laws. Section 13 (1) defines hate speech, in part, as follows: "use of threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour; display of any written material; publication or distribution of written material; distributing, showing or playing, a recording of visual images; which is threatening, abusive or insulting or; involves the use of threatening, abusive, or insulting words or behavior; which intends to stir up ethnic hatred, or having regard to all the circumstances – is likely to stir up ethnic hatred".

Under this section, the punishment for hate speech is "a fine not exceeding one million shillings or imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or both". Article 33 (2) subsection (d) of the Constitution states that the "right to freedom of expression does not extend to advocacy

of hatred that constitutes ethnic incitement, vilification of others or incitement to cause harm; or is based on any ground of discrimination specified or contemplated in Article 27 (4) - race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or social origin, color, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language or birth".

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter involves the research design, study population, population sample, sampling techniques, research instruments, data collection and data analysis. This segment further expounds the study participants and how they are involved as well as the ethical considerations of the research work.

#### **3.1 Research Design & Methodology**

##### **3.1.1 Research Design**

This study, which is quantitative and qualitative in nature, takes a descriptive research design in analyzing the relationship between social media and online interpersonal conflicts. The descriptive research design is considered appropriate because it not only helps elicit most complete responses from a sample of individuals presumed to be knowledgeable in the social media arena, but also because it relies on individual self-report on their knowledge and attitude.

##### **3.1.2 Target Population**

The target population is mainly social media users who use social media platforms for various needs/engagements. In particular, the study targets a population of about 1200 social media enthusiasts who were identified, from the researcher's perspective, based on their frequent use of social media to engage with audiences. While there are numerous social media platforms, the study focuses on Facebook and Twitter as they are "the most popular social media platforms and have existed for the longest time".

and Twitter) on their willingness to participate in the study, as well as to allow for the transmission of the link to the questionnaire

*([https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdv91olb2S2w5YvsQqpKpYV2bpFGnKD\\_eRCd0q0WwUDVpf3rw/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdv91olb2S2w5YvsQqpKpYV2bpFGnKD_eRCd0q0WwUDVpf3rw/viewform)).*

The researcher further conducted in-depth interviews with key informants (experts), like social media officers who make a living from existing in the social media space, such as bloggers and social media experts. These informants will be able to give insights on the subject of the study and why interpersonal conflict is rampant in online spheres.

### **3.1.5 Reliability and Validity of Research Instruments**

The validity of a research instrument refers to "an extent to which it does measure what it is supposed to measure while reliability is the ability of a research instrument to yield consistent results or data after repeated trials" (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). The research instrument was validated for content and face validity. To ascertain content validity, the researcher will consult the supervisor who reviewed and certified the instruments.

### **3.1.6 Data Analysis**

The study used quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedures. The data from the questionnaires and the interviews was categorized into various themes arising from the questionnaires to reflect views from the respondents.

## **3.2 Limitations and Challenges of the Study**

Through piloting the research methodology, the researcher was able to display and reduce some of the impediments that the study would have presented. The piloting efficiently rerouted

some of the methods in order to yield satisfactory results. Physical questionnaires were disseminated to a smaller representation of the total sample, through attaching the document to an email addressed to them. This method proved to be mundane in the sense that, it would be difficult to collate all the email addresses from the proposed sample of people, and await their responses in order to send the questionnaire. Therefore, the researcher opted to generate an online form of the questionnaire from which a link could be generated and then shared with respondents immediately through already existing social media association with the researcher and the respondent – such as Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp or Hangout, in real time.

### **3.3 Ethical Considerations**

The researcher upheld all ethical obligations expected in the design, data collection, analysis and dissemination of the entire study, after obtaining the Certificate of Field Work from the University in order to carry out the survey (see appendix III). An introductory statement was included in the online questionnaire to assure the respondents not only will the information they give is intended for academic purposes only but that confidentiality would be upheld. The researcher also held and oversaw the key informant interviews. After the research was complete, the researcher made the necessary corrections in consultation with the assigned supervisor and obtained a Certificate of Corrections (see appendix IV). Finally, in addition to adhering to the university's code of quality, the researcher generated an originality report within the requirements of the institution (see appendix V) and announced ownership of this study through the Declaration of Originality Form (see appendix VI). Further to the latter, all borrowed literature is cited to avoid plagiarism.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In this chapter, the researcher presents the study findings from the questionnaires administered separately to social media users/enthusiasts and in-depth interviews by key informants (social media officers). The study sought to examine the premise of social media usage for interpersonal conflicts, and the types and levels that exist. This is followed by discussions of the findings. The purpose and the objectives of the study were relayed to the respondents prior to the commencement of the survey process. They were additionally assured that the information they provided were solely for the purpose of the study and that their identities would remain confidential. All the questions asked through the questionnaires and the interview pertained only to the respondents use and insights on the types and levels of social media conflict – directly and/or indirectly. The presentation and interpretation of the data follows a thematic arrangement rather than under the objectives.

#### 4.1 Social Media Users

The respondents were purposely selected from the researcher's own list of Facebook friends and Twitter followers, based on their display as avid social media users, their interaction level and audience engagement, then, fundamentally, their availability to access and utilize the questionnaire via Google form: For ease of distribution across other platforms (such as WhatsApp and the Facebook Messenger application, the link (mentioned above) was further shortened to:

*<https://goo.gl/forms/HBE23lGPIK4mfHW33>*



*Fig 4.2.1. A screenshot of the researcher's Facebook page showing the number of friends the researcher had on the platform as of September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016 at 652*

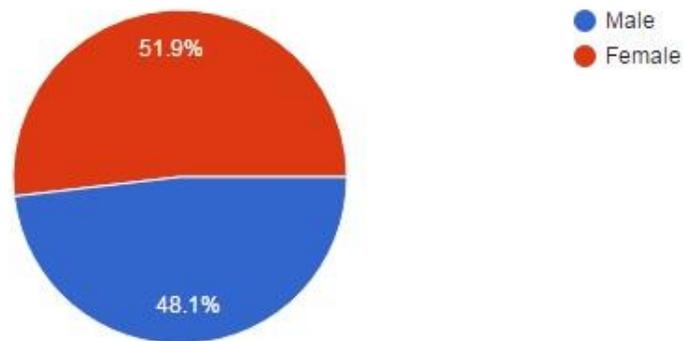


*Fig 4.2.2. A screenshot of the researcher's Twitter profile indicating the number of people subscribed to the profile (equivalent to friends on Facebook) at 671 as of September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016*

#### 4.1.1 Demographic Information

The study considered 65 respondents who were drawn mainly from the researcher's Facebook friends list and Twitter following, as those who had numerous friends and engaged frequently. The representation indicated that of the total responses, 51.9% were from females and 48.1% from males. This indicates that the study regarded gender representation and as a result, there was some balance achieved.

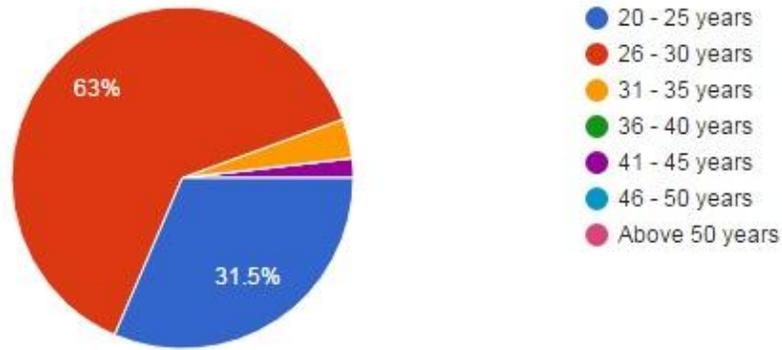
*Chart 4.2.1.1: Gender representation of social media users' sample*



*Source: Field research, 2016*

The results further presented that the most prominent age group of the population that was sampled was 26 – 30 years; this can be justified through the fact that the researcher interacts with this group more than the other age ranges as the immediate circle as 63% of the respondents fall in that category. This can also be interpreted as the majority of the age groups that engage on social media are of the age bracket between 20 – 30 years. This was an important factor to consider in this study as the researcher explored age as one of the reasons for online conflict (de)escalation.

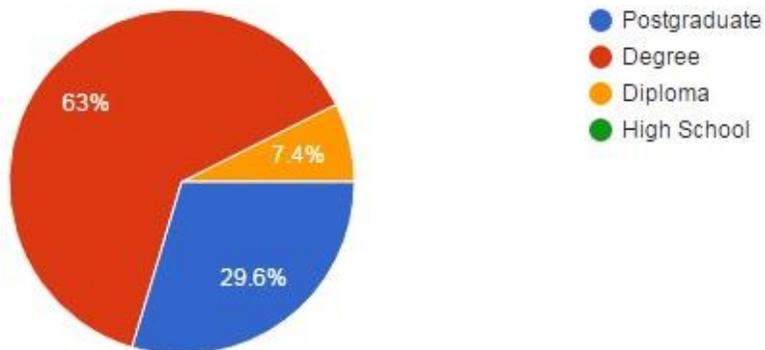
*Chart 4.2.1.2. Age representation of respondents*



*Source: Field research, 2016*

Further geographical information revealed the respondents levels of education. 63% of the respondents had completed a degree while 29.6% had pursued their education even further. None of the respondents represented lower education level than a diploma. This data is important, just as above as the researcher explored the education levels of users of social media as a cause of online conflict.

*Chart 4.2.1.3. Highest education level of the respondents*



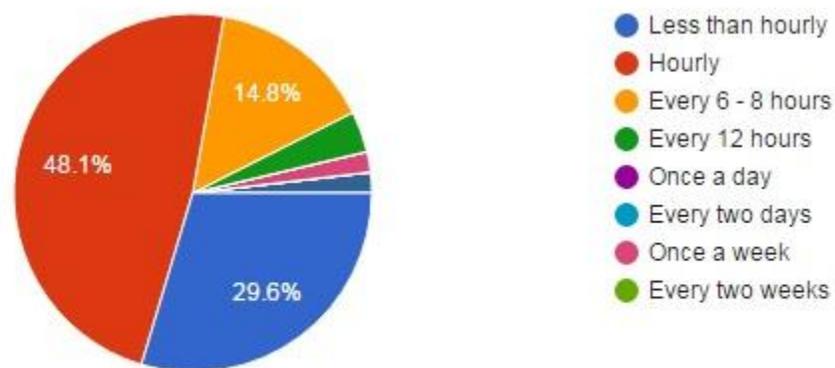
*Source: Field research, 2016*

### 4.1.2 Social Media Usage

On the use of social media, the study proposed to examine the extent at which social media was used, based on the various platforms and needs, as well as the frequency of use and engagement. Most of the respondents (48%) stated an hourly frequency of checking their social media platforms, as opposed to those who were the most frequent checkers at 29.6%, less than hourly. A minority of the respondents (1.9%) stated that they checked on their pages once a week.

The reason for this high response to the regular checking of social media platforms means that, in order to keep abreast with the current happenings of the social virtual world, one has to regularly check their *timelines* or *newsfeeds*. Those who are likely to come across, or participate in social media conflict, are those who are weary of the trends, and thus, more prone to accessing this information on a frequent basis. This number also indicates that social media access is more of a daily need than a hobby.

*Chart 4.2.2.1. Respondents' frequency on checking their social media pages*

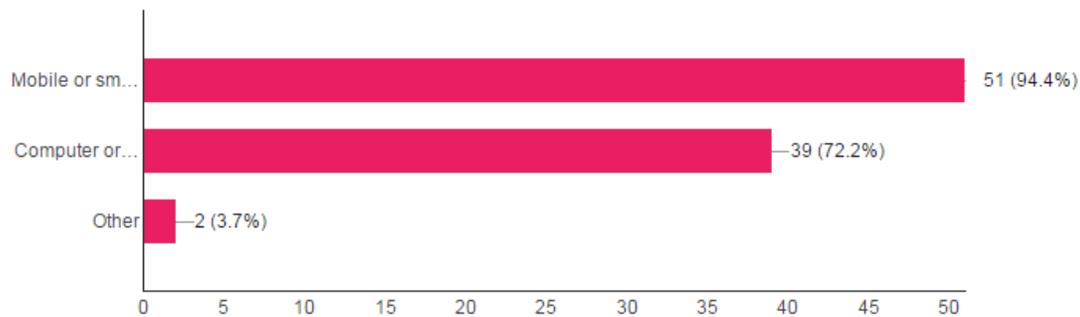


*Source: Field research, 2016*

It also examined the devices with which social media is accessed. The data revealed that social media platforms are generally accessible through computers (and laptops) as well as, with modern technological advancement, mobile phones (smartphones), on a higher scale. 3.7% of the respondents stated other methods of accessibility. This may be through other media reviews (like newspapers or TV and radio mentions) on trending social media topics, such as a popular weekly TV series known as *The Trend*, on NTV that un-packages the week's top social media picks based on hits (level of user engagement).

This means that a high number of people are accessing social media platforms through the convenience of hand-held devices rather than on laptops and/computers which would rather require one to set-up sort of a study table format. Smartphones are also convenient in that they do not always require a wireless internet connection in which to transmit and receive information, but through the SIM\* card technology, internet is made available on the data network. This goes for some tablets as well, that use almost the same technology as smartphones. These hand-held devices are also easier to operate and access, from wherever one may be, dependent on what they may be doing.

**Chart 4.2.2.2. Respondents' method of access to social media platforms**



**Source: Field research, 2016**

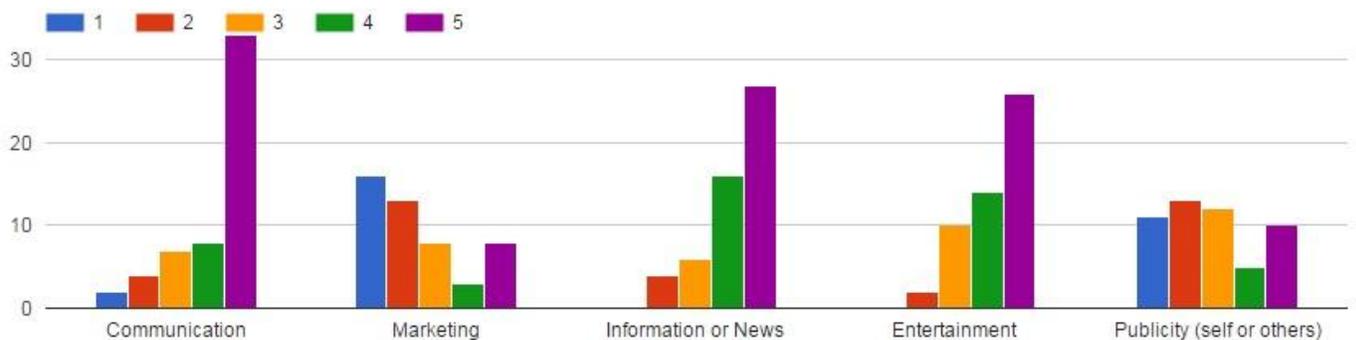
Social media is used for a variety of many needs, for this particular study, the respondents tallied these needs based on communication, marketing, information or news, entertainment and publicity (of self or others). On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest), the respondents identified communication as the highest use of social media, with information and entertainment following close. About half of the respondents (33) said that they used social media for communication purposes; 16 said that they used it for marketing and about a tied number of 27 of the respondents said that they used social media for entertainment and to access news and information.

This means that the highest need and hence gratification of social media usage is the communication aspect. This can be justified with the notion that the birth of social media was for communication purposes, where people engaged in chat-rooms to pass on messages to one another from different corners of the world. Another reason for the high indulgence of communication as a need of social media is the fact that the different platforms avail different level of engagement with users which enable them to communicate more efficiently. For example, Facebook has an inbuilt messaging application that allows its users to send messages

privately; WhatsApp is used widely as a communication application based on one's contact list – where they can send messages in text, audio and video format.

"These days, there is an incredible variety of SNS with many of them being linked to others to allow cross-posting. This in turn creates a space where users can reach a maximum number of people without sacrificing person-to-person communication" (Hendricks, 2013).

*Chart 4.2.2.3. Respondents use of social media, based on a scale of 0 - 5 (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest)*



*Source: Field research, 2016*

Asked of any other needs that social media fulfilled, most of the respondents said they used social media for networking, research, storage of information, selling & buying things (marketplaces), activism, learning & teaching (education), fundraising; and motivation, guidance and counselling. Others had more elaborate needs:

"Initiating contact with strangers, stalking..."

*(Research data, September 2016)*

"We can only speculate about what the future of social networking may look in the next decade or even 100 years from now, but it seems clear that it will exist in some form for as long as humans are alive" (Hendricks, 2013).

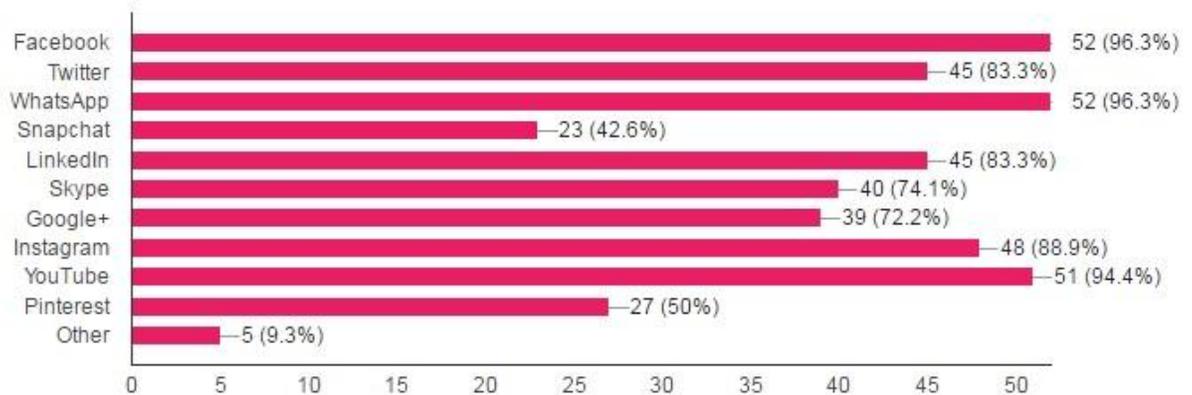
Even though this study focuses on Facebook and Twitter being the widely used social media platforms, various other platforms encourage their use through direct or indirect functions. For example, as earlier mentioned, "Instagram is an online mobile photo-sharing, video-sharing, and social networking service that enables users to take pictures and videos, and share them either publicly or privately, as well as through a variety of other social networking platforms. The service was acquired by Facebook in April 2012 and in 2013, Instagram grew by 23%, while Facebook, as the parent company, only grew by 3%" (Knibbs, 2014). Therefore the study explored the extent to which social media users are exposed to other platforms, as well as their subscription versus frequent use of them.

The data indicated that the respondents were mainly subscribed to Facebook and WhatsApp in equal measure (96.3%) comparable to Twitter (83.3%). The respondents were also heavily subscribed to YouTube (94.4%) and Instagram (88.9%), while Pinterest and Snapchat revealed the lowest number of subscribers at 50% and 42.6% respectively.

For reasons mentioned above, as communication being the most prevalent need of social media among respondents, Facebook and WhatsApp could be leading in this due to their multi-pronged capabilities. Facebook allows one to access all the other needs mentioned in the survey, thus allowing a user to rely on it as the sole form of social medium that keeps them connected at once on the go rather than like Instagram and YouTube that only allow for the sharing of only photos and videos, respectively. WhatsApp is also easily and readily available on any mobile device (as well as on laptop or computer via <https://web.whatsapp.com/>). WhatsApp allows its users to connect to those they prefer, especially from their personal telephone contact list; allows further for the creation of specific groups of people into a one-page setting where they can send

simultaneous messaging to the preferred people; and it also allows for the sharing of content further than just text – such as audio and video, as well as emoji\*.

*Chart 4.2.2.4. Respondent's subscription to various social media platforms*



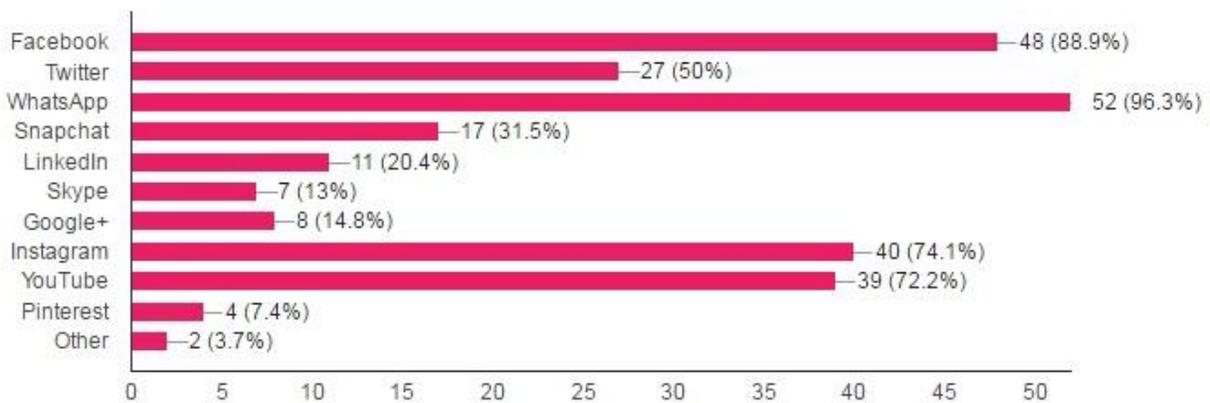
*Source: Field research, 2016*

But being subscribed to, and using a platform are two entirely different elements. Most social media users may sign up for a social media account but may never engage on them, based on various factors. Hence, the study further explored the frequency of the usage of the above sampled social media platforms by the respondents. Facebook and WhatsApp are frequently used at 88.9% and 96.3%; Twitter, as stated, seemed less frequent at 50%. Instagram (74.1%) and YouTube (72.2%) are the second most frequented platforms.

The reason for this representation is that, as mentioned above, Facebook and WhatsApp allow its users to do a variety of things over the social media platform, therefore those who subscribe to them, are likely to use them over that period of time rather than allowing them to sit as dormant applications on their smartphones. Facebook also has a large user base where almost everyone and anyone has a page, so it is easier for users to access those people or things that they need through the page of whoever they seek. This is such a rampant phenomenon, in that some

celebrities or businesses rather have a Facebook page than a website, and end up gaining clientele still in an equal matter. The reason that Twitter is not as popular in retaining subscribers is that it lacks the intimacy of the use of Facebook in that, it requires that two people follow each other back, in order to send direct messages, in camera. This could mean that Twitter may only therefore be used when its users need to get information about particular things, when these things are trending.

**Chart 4.2.2.5. Respondents frequently accessed social media platforms**

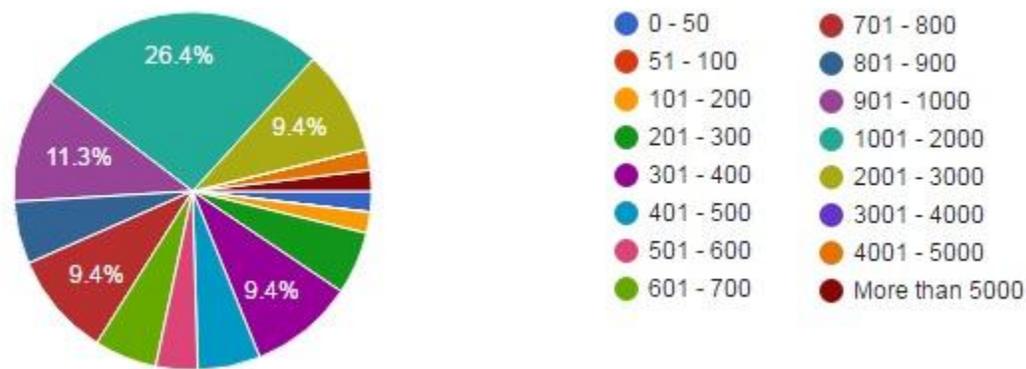


**Source: Field research, 2016**

As focus is maintained on Facebook and Twitter, the study revealed the number of friends and followers the respondents have on Facebook and Twitter, respectively. This in turn supported the premise that the sample was selected on the basis of their engagement being equal to the high number people they are friends with, or those that they follow. 26.4% of the respondents stated that they had 1001 – 2000 friends on Facebook, followed closely by respondents who had 901 – 1000 friends (11.3%). Comparable however, is the number of respondents (9.4%) who stated that they had between 301 – 400 and 701 – 800 friends on Facebook.

This means that the average number of friends that the respondents have lie in the 300 – 1000 friends. Consciously, since you have to accept someone’s request to be your friend on this platform, it is not hard to agree that this is an acceptable number of friends one can have, granted that Facebook only allows a user to have up to 5000 friends, meaning that if a particular user has reached the friendship threshold, he/she is required to delete some friends profiles from their list, in order to accept new ones. This is justifiable additionally in the event that this particular user gained these friends through direct interaction over a long period of time, or through the proverbial walks of life, where he/she has travelled to or been a part of (for example, having schooled in different locations, or working with multi-national organizations). Possibly, the high number of friends one has on social media may also be fueled by the need to feel popular, where one accepts all requests that they are notified about.

**Chart 4.2.2.6. Respondents number of friends on Facebook**

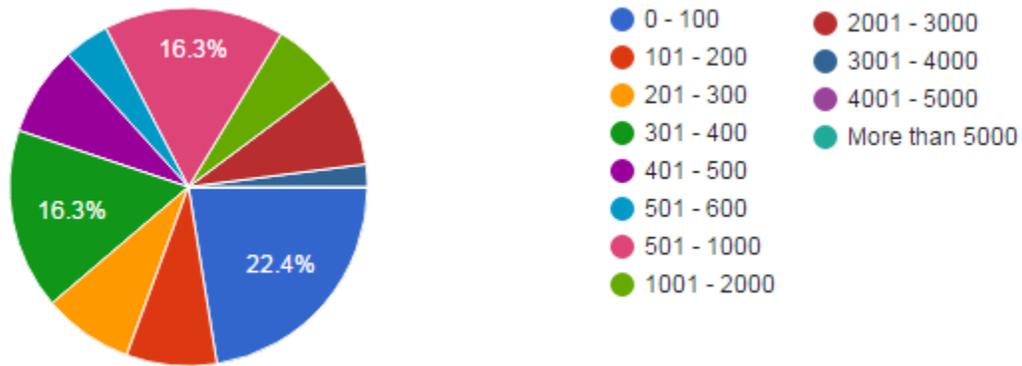


**Source: Field research, 2016**

On Twitter, the respondents with the highest number (22.4%) of followers was up to 100; while 16.3% of the respondents said that they had more than this at between 301 – 400 and 501 – 1000 followers. This is indicative of the users’ popularity in that, this number shows how many people subscribe to the information the user channels out. Being different from Facebook, Twitter does

not give its users the permission to decline these requests. Therefore, the higher your followers, the higher number of people who have access to your tweets, whenever posted.

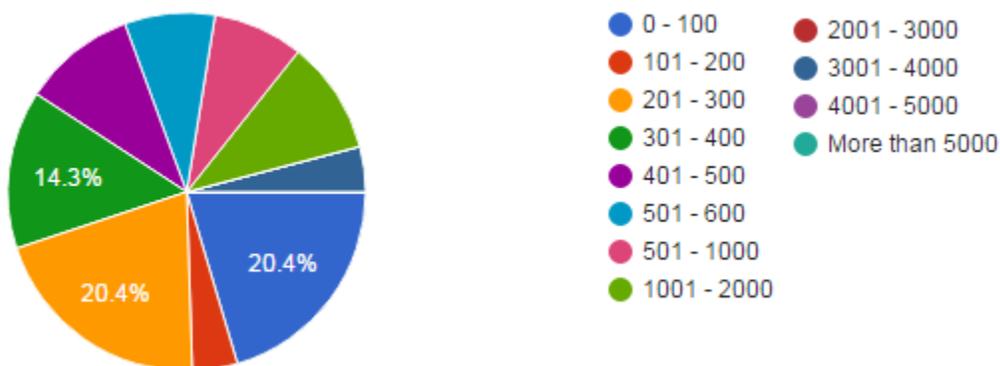
*Chart 4.2.2.7. Respondents number of followers on Twitter*



*Source: Field research, 2016*

Since Twitter provides for the reciprocal indication of popularity, the respondents were also asked to state the number of people that they were following. Similarly, a high number (20.4%) of the respondents stated that they were following between 100 and 201 – 300 people. 14.3% of the respondents were following 301 – 400 people on Twitter. This means that Twitter, as a social media platform gives one the freedom to choose what they would like to be exposed to frequently; thus indicating the kind of media they are prone to have access to.

*Chart 4.2.2.8. Respondents number of following on Twitter*



*Source: Field research. 2016*

Since social media thrives on hits and trending events, the researcher investigated the respondents memory of popular hashtags that they may remember based on engagement or the conversations they generated in mainstream media. This indicated the respondents' diverse tastes in issues that dominate the country's headlines. Of the prominent ones that featured were *#KOT*, *#SomeoneTell*, *#TBT*

*#KOT* stands for Kenyans on Twitter; according to the Daily Nation article on 8/11/2014, *#KOT* "is online community brought together by adversity, comical and serious scenarios, this group is now literally dictating what you listen to or even watch on TV. With different opinions on political and social issues, KOT are steadily becoming a platform for which dialogue is established and a source of diverse information".

*#SomeoneTell(CNN)* first surfaced in March 2012, when CNN's segment on a bus station bombing sparked anger for a banner reading "Violence in Kenya". In 2015, CNN again falsely painted a picture of Kenya as a 'hotbed of terror' following the recent Al-Shabaab attacks that had rocked the country, and in anticipation of US President Obamas visit to the country in 2015. The hashtag *#SomeoneTellCNN* appeared in 75,000 tweets in that day alone, to criticize the US network and demand an apology.

*#TBT* is a phenomenon that has risen the ranks in popularity just as the growth of the usage of social media has demanded. It stands for "throwback Thursday" and used to indicate an old photo, thought, idea, etc.

Additionally, most of the hashtags that the respondents stated were majorly on campaigns, intended for some sort of activism of citizen action, nationally or globally: *#BringBackOurGirls*, *#HandsOffOurElephants*, *#WeAreOne*

*#BringBackOurGirls* is a hashtag that swept the world when On April 14th 2014, over 270 girls were kidnapped from the Chibok Government Secondary School by Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria. Fueled by non-coverage by mainstream media, the hashtag gained popularity when in an “April 23 event honoring the Nigerian city of Port Harcourt, recently nominated as UNESCO's 2014 World Book Capital City, a former Nigerian government official and Vice President of the World Bank for Africa, Oby Ezekwesil spoke for the crowd in demanding the release of the school girls, saying, "Bring back the girls!" From there, the hashtag went viral, to the point that international celebrities also pitched in.”

The *#HandsOffOurElephants* movement was created to raise awareness and to garner political support to stop the poaching of elephants in Kenya. “Paula Kahumbu is the Executive Director of WildlifeDirect and leads the Hands Off Our Elephants campaign, launched in 2013. Its main goal is to stop the poaching, stop the trafficking and stop the buying of ivory. She hopes to use the media to drive behaviour change and empower communities to respond.”

*#WeAreOne* united Kenyans, following the 2013 “Westgate Mall attack when a group of young Kenyans aged between 22 and 25 using the Twitter hashtag were the most captivating, with their messages aimed at uniting the country through updates and insights on what was happening at the shopping mall. Through the initiative, the country was mobilized to give money and donate blood, as well as keeping the peace”.

Then there were those that stemmed from or ignited some sort of divide in opinion – nationally or globally: *#BlackLivesMatter*, *#BabaWhileYouWereAway*, *#IEBCmustGo*

Black Lives Matter is an “international activist movement, originating in the African-American community that campaigns against violence and systemic racism toward black people. It is a

movement that regularly protests police killings of black people and broader issues of racial profiling, police brutality, and racial inequality in the United States criminal justice system. In 2013, the movement began with the use of the hashtag *#BlackLivesMatter* on social media, after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of African-American teen Trayvon Martin”.

In May 2014, Kenyans started the hashtag *#BabaWhileYouWereAway* as a humorous but indulgent means to update the former Prime Minister Raila Odinga who was expected back from a three-month stay in US, on what has been happening in the country.

*#IEBCmustGo* is a more recent hashtag that has made its rounds on social media due to the internal wrangles between the government and opposition on the current situation of the incumbent commissioners of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission. The hashtag elicited the interest of the country, in the demand for the resignation of the commissioners before the next general elections

The intention of the researcher was to find out whether the respondents could link online conflict to their prominent memories of social media trends. This was not easily apparent as the responses cut across various and diverse themes. Additionally, some respondents were indifferent on the weight of hashtags, or opinionated to their use; some of their views were that either they did not use or follow hashtags or that they did not subscribe to Twitter which is notorious for the initial usage of hashtags.

“Can't recall”

“N/A (I rarely ever follow hashtags)”

“I don't frequent Twitter much hence my hashtag knowledge is limited.”

*(Research data, September 2016)*

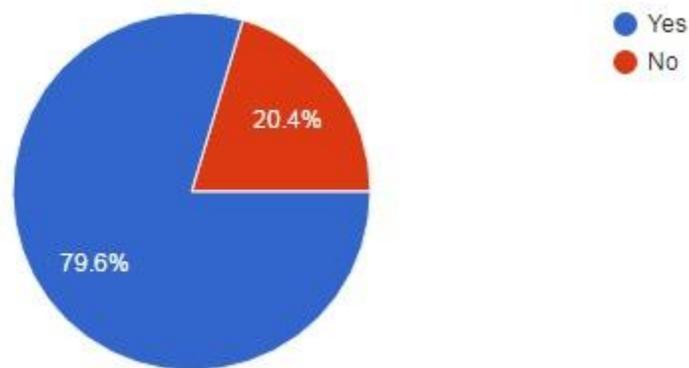
Asked on the *handles* that were most prevalent, *@RobertAlai* came up frequently among the respondents. "He is a Kenyan blogger, internet entrepreneur and cyber-activist. He has earned reputation for his ruthless stream of social outbursts that more often than not have misled, somewhat entertained and, not unusually, embarrassed public officials in equal measure. He was sued and briefly jailed for his highly opinionated political and personal attacks on politicians, government officials and business leaders. Alai's bold and audacious pursuit for positive action, and his almost extreme dislike for slow processes or corporate bureaucracy has turned him into an icon for justice, in a fashion different from common civil society. He has been engaged in political causes such as organizing and leading demonstrations against the excesses of Kenyan parliamentarians. In the wake of the Westgate shopping mall attack in Nairobi in September 2013, where over 65 people were killed, Alai was however praised, both by local and international media for his timely and creative use of Twitter to provide updates of what was happening at the mall as he virtually became the go-to person for the alternative, more accurate view. He was constantly tweeting, all day and night long, reporting on each and every significant happening. His accounts were considered as being more accurate than the updates provided by the authorities. Alai's twitter handle was suspended on 18 December 2014, but was later reinstated.

This indicated that social media users remember those who have caused ripples on social media based on not only the statements that they posted, but the actions that were taken towards them. And the above mentioned case also demonstrates that these kinds of controversial users gain numerous followers, by the minute, based on the *hits* they get, due to the kind of messages they transmit".

### 4.1.3 Prevalence of Interpersonal Online Conflict

Since the study seeks to find out the types and levels of social media conflict through the display that social media platforms have become the new battlefield for social media conflict, the respondents were asked on their encounter with conflict of social media. 79.6% of them stated that they had come across conflict on social media while 20.4% stated that they hadn't. This means that social media conflict is quite high, in any form that is understandable to most social media users, represented by the respondent sample.

*Chart 4.2.3.1. Respondents on their encounter with conflict on social media*



*Source: Field research, 2016*

Based on this, the researcher further wanted to investigate whether any of the respondents had been a target, a participant (or both) or none in engagement in online conflict, of which 61.1% said that they had never engaged in social media conflict; and of those who had, most (25.9%) were participants rather than targets (20.4%). This shows that in as much as online conflict exists, people are less likely to participate in it, based on a personal level, although some attested to be participants more than targets.

*Chart 4.2.3.2. Respondents on their participation with conflict on social media*



*Source: Field research, 2016*

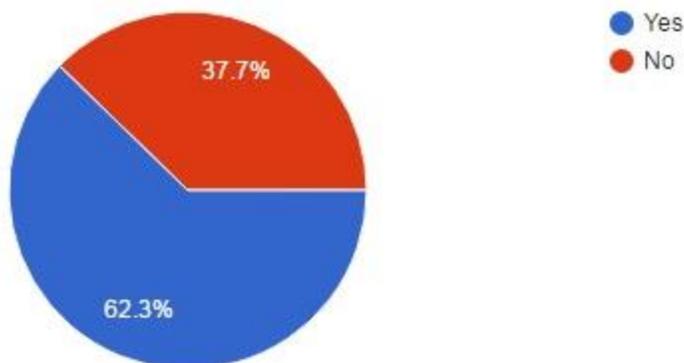
The study further sought to seek the perception of the types of social media conflict that exist. Most of the respondents mainly stated that online conflict mainly existed based along tribal/ethnic/racial lines, cyber bullying, social (media) bullying, trolling, body shaming and conflict between people in relationships. The most common type of online conflict that was stated however was that revolving around political differences and feminism. Some of them stated the following:

“Political conflict (Online political hostility)”  
“Usually mostly feminist arguments”  
*(Research data, September 2016)*

This evidences that social media conflict is not only confined to the usual terms like cyberbullying and/or online hate speech, but more modern forms have risen and other terms have been coined depending on the situation and in some cases, platforms (*tweefs* – arguments that arise among users on Twitter).

The study revealed that a large majority of the respondents (62.3%) believed that the age difference among social media users is a factor that contributes to online interpersonal conflict.

*Chart 4.2.3.3 Respondents account to age being a contributing factor towards online interpersonal conflict*



*Source: Field research, 2016*

Most of the respondents stated that there is a lack of understanding between age groups which presents a gap in the world view where users of different ages have different priorities and perspectives. Some of the arguments that support this result are:

“Generational gap creates value and character differences.”

“Age differences presenting as generational variations could spark conflicts. An older generation's interest or perspective over an issue could significantly differ from the younger generations. That provides a fertile ground for sprouting of friction.”

*(Research data, August and September 2016)*

They also said that younger people are more likely to be more open online making them more forthcoming and public in their interactions. Additionally, that older people tend to be more conservative and accepting of racism, misogyny and bigotry.

While the rest (37.7%) didn't believe that age had anything to do with interpersonal online confrontations stating that users would most likely not reveal their real age so it is unlikely to know the correct age of the people they interact with; that online interaction depends on thinking and clarity of thought. They further stated that people of all ages bash each other regardless of age group, that the topic is usually the issue. The following are some direct views from the

respondents who do not believe that age among users has anything to do with the cases of conflict on the internet:

“I don't see how the age correlation can lead to online interpersonal conflict. It mostly results from misunderstandings and pre-existing issues among individuals. ”

“I think it is could be more of a clash in views or personality, also people participate because it's fun to gang up against someone or something, e.g. Kenyans against South Africans etc.”

*(Research data, August and September 2016)*

The researcher in a bid to find out the levels of online interpersonal conflict posed accessibility to social media platforms as a reason for engagement. A greater part of the respondents, at 79.6% stated that accessibility to social media platforms makes it favorable for people to engage in online conflict. This is supported by the fact that as earlier revealed, social media is best accessible through mobile phones and smartphones, making it easier for everyone to potentially have access to it. The respondents stated that online conflict only shows up if accessibility is guaranteed. Accessibility has become affordable to many and so more people on the platforms and a lot more varied thoughts and opinions. Many people are on social media and hence many can be reached, targeted, participate or incited. This is because social media provides a platform for individuals to express themselves therefore people tend to leverage on this opportunity which could in-turn cause conflict. They added that social media gives everyone an equal chance to be heard and the personal expressions may help exacerbate conflicts. The fact that social media is free means that one can use it for whatever they see fit. Even for conflict.

Below are some of the statements that support this argument:

“Easy access makes it quite effortless to provoke/cause conflict.”

“If I'm pissed at someone, the quickest way to express that unhappiness is to grab your phone and jump on social media. Rather than driving across the city to confront them face-to-face like they did in the 1950s...”

“It's very easy to post your opinion, thus making it easy for those who disagree with you to reply.”

“Accessibility=More users. More users=Multiplicity of voices and opinions. Which generally leads to conflict. ”

*(Research data, August and September 2016)*

The rest, 20.4%, stated that conflicts generally existed even before social media; that social media merely presented a platform. That more people from different ideological settings can access social platforms anytime, everywhere. They are just bound to disagree. Here is what they stated on why social media is not necessarily an outlet for conflict:

"Social media is a new way to old things, communicate in this case. So people will always have conflict no matter what type of platform it will be. That's what all these platforms, to socialize. So the result of conflict is human interaction. The essence of these platforms. "

"It's a matter of perception. I have benefited a lot from social media (communication, enlightenment, entertainment, news updates on current affairs). The advantages outweigh the limitations. It has also been used to harmonize/unite people towards a common course. "

*(Research data, September 2016)*

This means that there are those who believe that conflict on social media exists because conflict is human nature, as long as there is provocation and based on the conflict cycle. Most respondents further fortified their responses with the fact that on social media platforms (in general, the internet), people are more likely to engage in online confrontation based on the guise of anonymity. Social media has enabled this façade, where people are free to present themselves in any shape and form. The respondents said that people can easily access social media and maintain anonymity, therefore they are more comfortable participating in conflict due to lack of physical repercussions. The fact that it is easy to get behind a keyboard and anonymous

username, when social media is easily accessible, to attack someone else. They additionally stated that people can post anything while hiding behind their computers and phones knowing very well that it'll be hard to get caught. Most people that engage in conflict over social media do so because they think can get away with it as there is no physical confrontation. This is supported by the following:

“Because it provides for a place where people meet but not face-to-face hence it eliminates the fear of direct attack but creates emotional confrontations.”

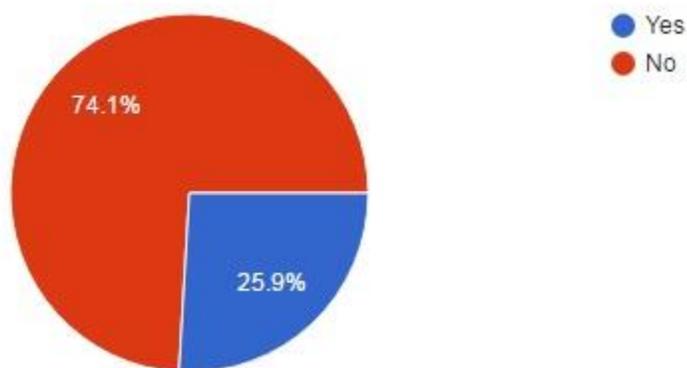
“People always feel more confident in a virtual space.”

“People can hide behind Twitter handles while spewing hate, not many of them would have the nerve to be aggressive to someone in person.”

*(Research data, September 2016)*

As much as social media usage presents a façade of anonymity, 74.1% of the respondents stated that they do not feel safe to engage in online social media conflict. This indicates that, the respondents are reasoned, in whatever capacity, not to engage in social media conflict based on the safety of either their virtual identities or the repercussions that may arise.

*Chart 4.2.3.4 Respondents on their feeling safe in engaging in social media conflict*

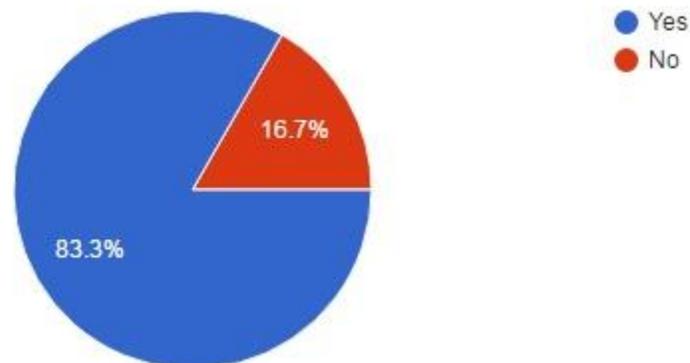


*Source: Field research, 2016*

The study find out that another high cause of online interpersonal conflict is castigated by the differing social classes and/or relationships among social media users with 83.3% of the

respondents said that this was a factor in terms of interpersonal engagement on social media platforms.

*Chart 4.2.3.5 Respondents take on the influence of social standing and relationships among social media users as a reason for online interpersonal conflict*



*Source: Field research, 2016*

The study revealed that while differing social classes among users of social media conflict is a large contributing factor to the vice, most of the respondents accrued it to a sense of power-play that exists in the society “mostly because if the character is wealthy or perceived so, "haters" will feel jealous.” That sometimes social media conflict presents itself like a fight between the haves and have nots and the difference is utilized for incitement. There is a gap between the middle class working users and lower class users, where different social cadres tend to come with varying approaches to issues. These approaches are never easily harmonized, hence the conflict.

The below are some of the statements made by the respondents:

“Especially on Twitter there is Twitter A and Twitter Z, the former being the more up-scale with "high end" problems and issues.”

“People with same social classes or who have a relationship in real life tend to back each other up and take sides in conflicts, prolonging them.”

*(Research data, September 2016)*

Of the 16.7% of the respondents who stated that social standing was not a cause of online conflict attributed most of their reasoning to the fact that people who (de)escalate conflict online are compelled to, based on other triggers that are not necessarily bound by where one is placed on the social ladder such as the push and pull factors in conflict. That some people frustrate people of all social classes regardless of the social class they fit in, and that conflict is more character based. Of notable mention, a respondent concurred with the following statement:

“No, when you strip down all the societal constructions, that has been deeply ingrained in all our mind, the problem is we simply refuse to use our own minds and have to settle for what society has in place for us. It's all a matter of interpersonal ethics. What's happening on social media isn't new. It happened way before its advent. New ways of doing old things. And we'll probably have this same questions for a new platform that comes up. ”

*(Research data, September 2016)*

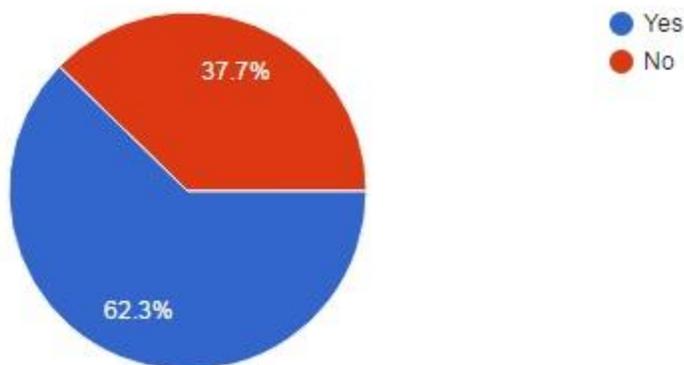
The study also revealed that on social media platforms, there are set ranks in which users exist amongst themselves. This is evident, and displays itself magnificently in reference to *socialites*. Socialites are people who have become known in the celebrity realm as those who are always seen and heard everywhere for one reason or another. In Kenya, the socialite phenomenon has spread wildly in the last two years or so based on indecent exposure of mainly females, who have famously earned the title. This has exposed them to excessive bashing through social media; where as many followers (or subscribers) they have, makes them even more vulnerable to ridicule from members of the public. Examples of some of the Kenyan socialites in the limelight are Vera Sidika, Huddah Monroe and Pendo Wema. A respondent had the following view:

“Social media has their own sort of social class... The more followers you have the higher you are ranked in the social media platform hence creating a sense of power over those who have less or are not in the same line of popularity. E.g., Joe Muchiri vs. Huddah conflict. ”

*(Research data, September 2016)*

The researcher also wanted to find out whether different education levels among social media users is a cause for online interpersonal conflict. 62.3% of the respondents stated that education level among peers/users is a factor that contributes to online interpersonal conflict.

*Chart 4.2.3.6 Respondents view on the whether the difference in education levels of social media users contributes to online conflict*



**Source: Field research, 2016**

Of the 37.7% who stated otherwise, most claimed that education level has nothing to do with the way people interact online, and more specifically to conflict (de)escalation online. These respondents said that the weight of people’s opinions as the reason for online conflict on social media. That since everyone is entitled to their own view, regardless of educational background, social media platforms do not identify or separate along education levels and it's not easily to distinguish anyway to be able to know. They further stated that the level of education has no say in opinions, and yet social media is heavily based on opinions; a social media user, regardless of educational background, is likely inclined to contribute to online conflict based on ingrained political, religious and social views and not compromising on one's stand. They also argue that not all people with the same level of education will hold similar views with one another. For instance politics, people with the same level of education can have completely differing political

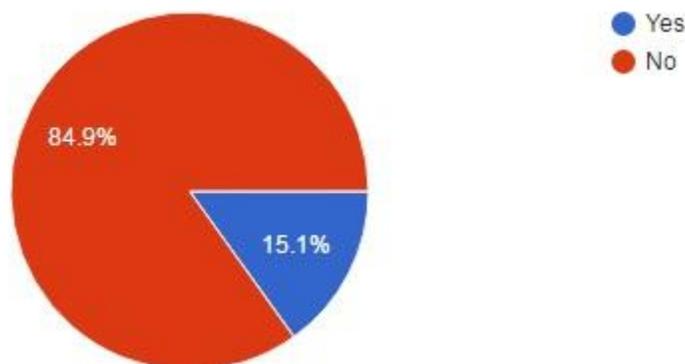
views and therefore likely to conflict with someone who supports an opposing political party irrespective of their educational level. This is further supported as so:

“The use of social media is not necessarily affected by education or lack thereof. Smart phones and apps nowadays are pretty easy to understand and operate. Peers using social media are usually on an equal playing field until interaction becomes personal and information about the users is also public. To put it simply, people rarely cause conflict without being provoked.”

*(Research data, September 2016)*

Cutting across all the reasons that may spark online conflict, the study found out that political differences was a pattern that presented itself in the interactions people have with each other. That politics is the number one issue that would bring up interpersonal conflict on social media platforms. But in as much as the internet provides the sense of anonymity, 84.9% of the respondents said that they would not carry out social media conflict based on political interests. This shows that respondents maintain their logical approach, just as in above, in engaging in politically fueled online conflicts.

*Chart 4.2.3.7 Respondents view on whether they would carry out social media conflict based on political interests*

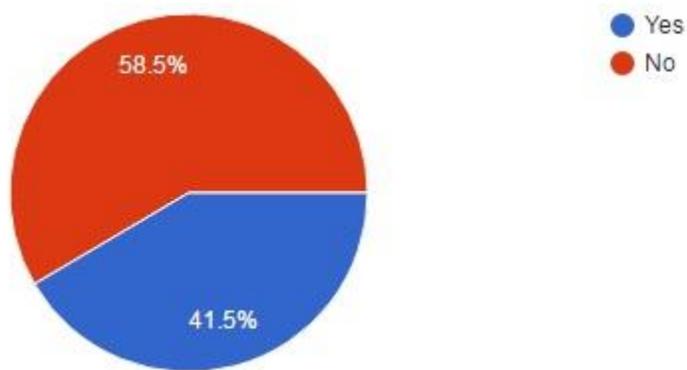


*Source: Field research, 2016*

Surprisingly however, even more (58.5%) of the respondents stated that they were likely to be direct on political views online. This enforces the earlier conviction that social media presents a

veil with which people can hide behind in order to be direct on views that are likely to spark conflict among internet users.

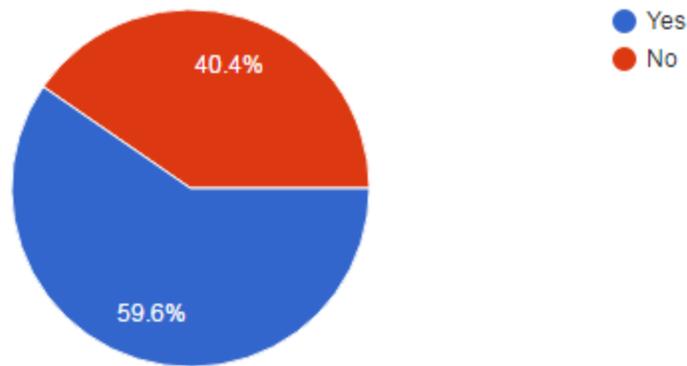
*Chart 4.2.3.8 Respondents view on whether they would be likely to be direct on political views online.*



*Source: Field research, 2016*

Since politics was displayed as the leading cause of online interpersonal conflict among social media users, the researcher felt the need to explore the thoughts on the regulation of the occurrence of this. More than half of the respondents, at 59.6% felt that there should be regulations imposed on online political conflict. This implies that there is a need for social media content to be regulated in order to curb some of the incidences of online conflict.

*Chart 4.2.3.9 Respondents view on whether online political conflicts should be regulated*



*Source: Field research, 2016*

Giving examples of which bodies could be in charge of this, most of the respondents stated bodies that would not be manned by the government. This suggests that there is low faith that the government can be in charge of an institution that will block freedom of expression on social media, where government officials are likely more than in other media, spread their political agenda. They mostly mentioned the media, trend setters, bloggers, activists, influencers as those who could possibly regulate social media posts by avoiding hardline political positions on their reporting – maintaining neutrality and unbiased reporting. Others said independent and non-local bodies should be in charge of this, if not ourselves, where we observe some sense of respect for others. Other respondents stated that the social media platforms should take responsibility of regulation by immediately taking down posts that seem heated and abusive.

Although some maintain that it is the responsibility of the government, based on already existing laws and policies; signifying the knowledge of the respondents on the stipulations that the law has regarding freedom of speech and the related legal frameworks. That one of the numerous government commissions (or councils) that oversees media usage, such as the Communications Authority of Kenya. If not, Parliament should set up a public protection commission that will be

looking at the online political confrontations and recommend who should be charged in a court of law. The commission should also have social media experts who should be tasked on carrying out social media civic education especially in major cities. Additionally, the government should take this on through the KICA Act since there is no other Act in Kenya that directly deals in these kind of conflicts. Ideally, by the organizations offering the communication medium - depending on how public the forum is, various levels of regulation can be implemented. Generally, these platforms should have stringent policies governing user communication to discourage hate speech/ violence instigation. They should include easily executable reporting options in their terms of use. This can be done fairly easily in public groups / open post situations but becomes increasingly difficult with private interactions. For instance, encrypted communications within WhatsApp groups cannot be effectively regulated. This needs to be done without imposing on user rights such as freedom of speech and association. This is backed up by the below:

“The government (the ministry in charge of information and communication), introducing guidelines/regulations on expression of political views and opinions to minimize hate and incitement. Also introduce heavy penalties/repercussions on those who fuel conflict on social media. (NB: Public/stakeholders should be involved in the establishment of the guidelines/regulations to prevent bias or conflict of interest.)”

*(Research data, August 2016)*

The respondents were asked to assess their interpretation of online religious conflict, in an attempt to distinguish whether religion can be a factor that (de)escalates conflicts online. Most of the respondents, stating the ways in which religious conflicts manifest online stated that they only stir more trouble than provide any answers and that most appear and reappear after a terrorist attack. Others stated that it basically manifests through expression of contradictory stands to other religious doctrines since it is also very evident and people feel the need to express

themselves due to the freedom of expression. In the end, it is evident that the real cause of religious online conflict results from difference of opinion. Religious conflict manifests like all other conflicts which occur when people with differing views or differences in opinion disagree. Some disagreements can get out of control leading to insults, bullying, threats and other forms of aggressive behaviour. Because religion is such a controversial topic, most conflicts that result from it tend to escalate very quickly. Religion is a very sensitive and relative topic considering we have different denominations that practice different teachings. Online religious conflict is manifested through judgement among individuals where members of different faiths could thus take the differences in faith to the online space and argue out their cases there. Additionally, it starts with lack of acceptance and understanding that everyone is entitled to their own beliefs and manifests when people start showing off how 'holier' they are and how everyone should conform to their beliefs, that is intra-religion. Inter-religion conflict manifests when one religion blames the other for a problem in society most common example is bomb attacks. That also, when people are not educated about other people's religious views and they think they are the ones to judge who's right and who's not.

While most distinguish religious online conflict as bashing towards people of differing religious standpoints or faith, online conflict shows no bounds when it comes to the reasons to which people participate in it. It doesn't discriminate, and it exists in different forms and ways, as long as there is a reason to inflict it upon another. The following are excerpts of the respondents' views:

“Mostly now [bashing] is on Muslims because of the stereotyping on terror. I think it is very wrong for those that are there just like any others who are Christians.”

“I do not see a lot of religious conflict as regards Kenya. I see such from international online participants. It is especially on shunning Islam as a violent religion.”

*(Research data, September 2016)*

This study also reveals that religious conflict is rampant outside of social media and that social media merely presents an easier platform for it to manifest. A lot of religious people see every interaction as an opportunity to impose their opinions on other people, especially if their audience is of another faith. The lack of 'physical consequence' with a social media interaction further catalyzes the willingness to attack others over their beliefs. It primarily occurs amongst individuals who lack mental sobriety. More often than not, these arguments usually lack objectivity and are rarely resolved. Religious conflicts are stewed in negative stereotypes that have no significant basis.

The researcher additionally intended to link political and religious online conflict since the two are almost similar in inciting different personal views/opinions as well as generating online engagements. The respondents majorly stated that the occurrences of both types of conflict were the same and the way in which they were carried out was based on divided opinions and intended for stereotyping. The two are notably related where the kind of political views one holds, the political ideologies one subscribes to - are, more often than not, informed by his or her religious affiliation. That both are based on ideologies of religious or political inclinations at the time of the argument that attract the same degree of emotional response. Depending on the issue, both could attain the same gravity and tend to bring the worst out in people.

However, most of the respondents stated that there was a difference in the manifestation of these two types of conflict when they appear online. This means that the two sets of conflicts have presented different views in regards to the levels at which they represent themselves. Based on the respondent's views, the different levels of these two types of conflict show the intensity to which they occur or exist. They stated that religious online conflict is more dangerous and emotional as it has specific, standard triggers and can get quite personal unlike political online

conflict where political opinions shift, they are always changing; political conflict is driven by ever changing situations. Political conflict is to a larger extent healthier as it is through that expression of views and interaction that general public perception, views and priorities are addressed and in some cases agreed upon. Additionally, political conflict ends or dies down every so often and is reignited by politicians whereas religious conflict is futile as areas of conflict within doctrines are static, resulting in no resolution to the conflict. Religious conflict is also based on spiritual reference while political conflict is based on government styles of leadership. People in general tend to be more defensive of their religious views as religion in most cases dictates ones morals not merely an opinion that favours one kind over the other as tends to be the case with politics. As a result conflict is more likely to manifest when people express differing religious views. Below is a statement that supports this notion:

“Religious conflict is usually more visceral and has no middle ground of compromise to be sought. Political conflict that is less personality based and more issue based can arrive at a relative middle ground.”

*(Research data, September 2016)*

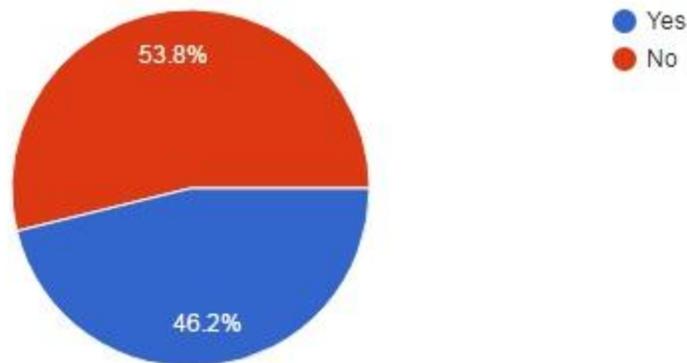
The researcher further intended to find out whether there were any other reasons that cause online interpersonal conflicts. Of those who responded in the affirmative, most of the respondents stated issues of invasion of privacy, especially into personal information of other users' pasts (reference to the emerging cases of uncovered sex tapes where current celebrities have been *shamed* online based on past private sexual misdeeds – that were captured on video – released to the public through these platforms; elicited conflict towards not only the victim of the exposure but between the fans of the celebrity and the rest of the public. A lot of conflict transpires online due to differences in opinion especially on moral issues such as the infamous *mpango wa kando* phenomenon and the now recent bashing on sponsors (in this case, sponsors

being much older men who are deemed to take advantage of young girls in exchange for a lavish lifestyle – money, expensive holidays, extravagant nightlife. Another reason that stirs online interpersonal conflict is based on a conflict of ideologies that stem from racism, careers/profession, family matters, traditional or ethnic inclinations, domestic relationships, sports and judicial matters. A rising trend in online conflict it witnessed based on gender biases and sexual orientation manifested though misogyny (dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women), body shaming, etc.

Respondents were asked based on experience, how people their offices/schools deal with interpersonal confrontations and the channels that they use (apart from online). This was important to deduce whether social media is enabling confrontations to be made simpler, or whether traditional forms compare. Most of the respondents stated these conflicts are dealt with head on, with the presence of a mediator. That their colleagues talk with some form of arbitration (via the human resource department) through face-to-face confrontations, sit downs, telephone, email, physical scuffles...the parties involved agree to discuss their issues, escalate the matter to someone more equipped to resolve the conflict.

This means that interpersonal social media conflict could do with a middleman who can act as a mediator between varying points of view among users (especially on trending topics). Slightly, half of the respondents (53.8%) supplement this case, that there incidents of online conflict resolution.

#### 4.2.3.10 Respondents view on whether there incidents of online conflict resolution



*Source: Field research, 2016*

Comparably, the respondents did not feel that there were any mediators of the sort on online platforms. Some of the respondents stated that the reason for this is that the nature of online conflict is that it dies a natural death; or that there are cases where entities could normally resolve their conflict through more private means such as direct messaging. They stated that:

“Either people talk about it online amongst themselves and it ends or it just ends. Mediators aren’t really a thing online.”

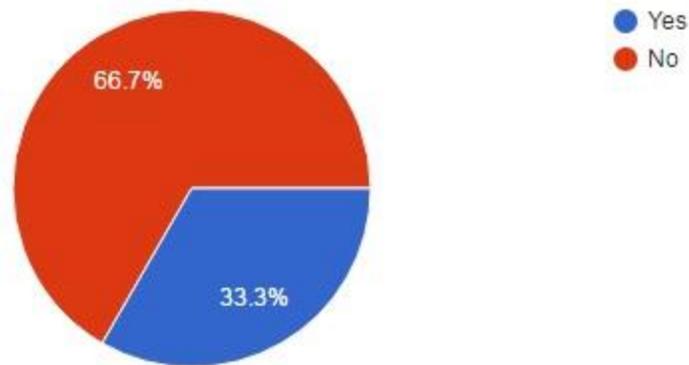
*(Research data, September 2016)*

The few mediators who have tried to come out are still condemned to a specific school of thought not as independent, or there cases where people continue to fuel the conflict where people thrive during *tweefs*, and therefore no one is trying to moderate anything. Of those who try to take on the role of arbitration, they come up and end a conflict once in a while but they have no authority to do so; they are simply a mature third party, free of any inclinations to either parties at war. For instance:

“I have only heard of selective justice when 'popular', rich or politically connected people have accessed justice for online bullying. It seems to be a privileged for a select few who have something to give or ransom in exchange for justice. It is not a fair system.”

*(Research data, September 2016)*

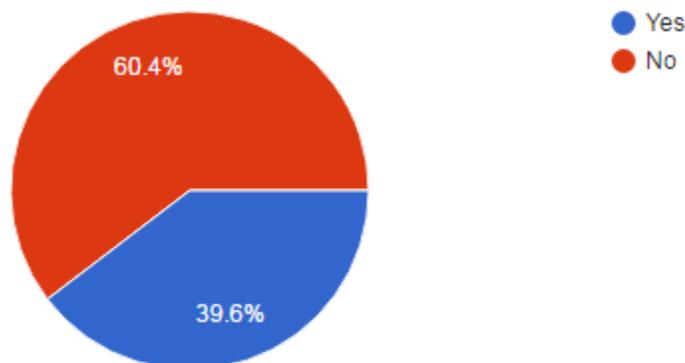
**4.2.3.11 Respondents views on whether there are mediators of online interpersonal conflict**



**Source: Field research, 2016**

Asked on their awareness of any laws that prohibit online conflict like cyber bullying and/or hate speech in Kenya 60.4% of the respondents stated that they did not know any of these existed. This means that there lacks proper mindfulness of what lies in the law as far as the constitution is concerned in the Bill of Rights. It also means that the Kenya Information and Communication Act has not been fully sensitized to the users of telecommunication systems such as internet users; if it has, then the reach is dismal.

**4.2.3.12 Respondents on their awareness of laws that speak on social media conflict (cyberbullying and hate speech)**



**Source: Field research, 2016**

## **4.2 Social Media Officers/Enthusiasts**

### **4.2.1 Demographic Information**

The study considered 3 social media enthusiasts as key informants to the study identified through their job descriptions as having worked with or on social media platforms for a living as a social media officer, new media manager and blogger. They were hand-picked by the researcher based on interaction on social platforms as well as their expertise on the subject matter. Of the 3, 2 were male and 1 was female. Their highest education level is a degree in the profession of journalism, with one currently pursuing postgraduate studies in a related field. The years of experience in the social media profession collectively ranges between 2 – 4 years.

### **4.2.2 Social Media Usage**

The researcher asked the key informants what they considered some of the major uses of social media today in a bid to collectively compare the response with those of the social media users. The social media officer stated that communication ranked high in the use for social media as “it has enabled people to be brought closer through being constantly in touch over the internet,” perhaps comparable to more traditional forms of communication such as the telephone or sending letters. The new media officer based his use of social media towards his professional needs identifiable through the work he does. “I use social media for the purpose of information and news...in order to know what is trending, what people are talking about. That to me is my number one use of social media.” He however further stated that the uses and needs of social media today are interlinked in that, where one hopes to communicate a message to others online, the receiver absorbs this as news, or vice versa. The uses of social media are multiple. The blogger stated that social media has broadened the ability for publication of media, in every way;

in that “in this day and age, everyone and anyone...anywhere can publish whatever they want the world to see – from videos, photos, letters, you name it...”. The informants also stated that social media has evolved the way people advertise these days. What used to cost a lot to set up a product for captivation by audiences can now be done for free on social media platforms. “These days even websites are free; when I initially set up my site, I had to spend a lot of money. I wish I had waited.”

This means that, the uses of social media are diverse just as there are the people who use them. Social media can be used for a broader variety than the ones stated by the respondents, and they are in turn evolving in our everyday lives; with the advancement of technology in tow.

#### **4.2.3 Occurrence of Interpersonal Online Conflict**

The key informants were asked to un-package some of the types of social media conflict they have ever experienced/witnessed. They all demonstrated that indeed social media conflict exist today, and all of them could attest that they had come across various forms, but the most prevalent was bashing (political, religious and personal), hate speech and small incidences of cyber bullying. In bashing, the social media officer stated that this was the simplest type of social media conflict that exists especially among users who need to air their opinions on current affairs, or trends. “In any space where one wants to be heard, there is bound to be conflict...especially where people will have different opinions amongst one another. It is almost inevitable.” The new media officer emphasized on online political conflict where people demonstrate rivalry depending on which side of the political divide that they come from. “Every day there is a story about the government that makes social media burn hot with opinions from both sides; those in the opposition will be quick to engage with the supporters of whatever new move the government has planned. In the case the government has done something wrong, trust

me, the opposition will have a field day. This is where I grab my popcorn and watch it unfold.” The blogger said that hate speech is a rising case of online conflict that needs to be defined so that people don’t get away with the injury they inflict on others. “People have weighty opinions, and this is bound to get way out of hand where others may not agree. When people talk badly about others in the virtual world, it just goes to show that we are allowing it.”

The key informants broke down the levels of social media conflict that exist currently as based on personal attacks and genuine banter on various platforms. This means that the different categories can be distinguished based on the intent of the message, or the messages surrounding a post, towards the person in receipt. The social media officer stated that the levels of conflict online are based heavily on the opinions people may have over certain topics, over what others think. “That is when people start to argue...when they cannot see eye to eye with each other.” But depending on how one wants to handle the confrontation, this is where the level (de)escalates. The new media officer stated that levels of social media conflict are defined where there’s a lot at stake, such as political or religious views, “that is when it becomes personal or when tables are turned. Also in some cases, some of the conflict is mild and only elicits healthy debates among mainly peers, or people who share the same interests.” The blogger generally stated that the levels of online interpersonal conflict are either high or low. In the cases where they are high, dire consequences that manifest. “People have lost their lives due to cyber bullying where their self-esteem has been damaged so much that they see no other way to live with it than take their own lives...in other cases, some people brush off the statements that are thrown at them in the comment section of some posts they have put up. In fact some have even become popular based on the number of times they flare up an argument; mostly, they move on from it as soon as the hype dies down.” This means that the levels of social media conflict can be

categorized in various ways based on posts (messages posted on social media platforms – directly or indirectly), the senders and the receivers of these messages and the kind of damage they inflict.

The researcher wanted to find out, from the key informants, some of the reasons or motivations that people indulge in social media conflicts. This raised many answers but the key ones that emerged were also mentioned by the respondents in the previous section such as the anonymity of the internet. The informants each said that this was one of the top reasons as to why there is rampant interpersonal conflict online. The social media officer stated, “the only reason some people would be as vocal as they are on these platforms is because they are in the comfort of their homes or behind their desks when they type these messages. It is not like they are going to face the person they are insulting or having a *tweef* with. Social media is a safe space.” The new media officer reiterated this, stating that those who are prone to indulge in social media conflict do so because they know they will not get caught. “It is far more easier than meeting the school bully on the playground. On social media, there are no bounds such as physical representation that can make one appear weaker than the other.” The blogger added that social media conflict is propagated generally where people see a gap, “when there is need to. Some people tend to pick fights with others just because they can.” This means that social media has made it much simpler for interpersonal conflict to manifest simply because it has created a realm where people do not have to be in the presence of one another to have these debates, making it more alluring for people to do so. Social media has also made people lazy, in that they would rather have these debates online than seek to gather an audience with the intended parties. This can be linked to the responses from the informants where they state that social media is very accessible. “If you can just pick up your phone and tell Raila (opposition leader) that you are not pleased with his

leadership of his party, you can. And wait for his supporters to bash you right back, online. There is no need to meet at the next rally. In fact people are now even holding rallies online, via Skype. Social media is the future, I tell you.”

The key informants stated that those who are more inclined to carry out social media confrontations are people who believe their opinion is more important than others. They are always commenting on trending topics, and always hoping to be the ones to make the most noise about it. The social media officer said, “People have become overnight celebrities just based on this, where they are always in the limelight for giving an opinion...based on the theme of the trend. Say politics, you will always hear Robert Alai and his opinion on what should be done, how where and when. These are the people who fuel online confrontations. And now he is almost the go-to person for political opinion.” The new media officer stated that those more inclined to carry out social media confrontations are those who believe that people need to hear them speak out. Especially on things that are current affairs. “As long as there is something to talk about, there is this crop of people who believe that the world is waiting for them to speak about it....to shape the opinions of others.” The blogger concurred by stating, those who carry out conflict on social media “have large egos in believing that the masses need to hear from them; this in turn makes people go into a frenzy”. What this means is that social media has created a platform for those who have weighty opinions (or appear to), are more likely to cause interpersonal conflict because their opinions are shaped by the current affairs of the society, and the other way around.

The researcher wanted to find out some of the major ideologies that drive perpetrators of online interpersonal conflict. The key informants collectively resonated that advocacy and political scrutiny that have emerged as the key reasons towards this drive. That when people believe they

are entitled to say something towards the society or the government (respectively), they will. The informants stated that online activism is rampant in Kenya where on any given day there is a likely cause on all social media platforms. This can likely spark interpersonal conflict, especially between people who drive the cause, and those who don't believe in it. For example, in 2014, there was a public outcry on the way in which due to the way some women dressed, they were stripped in public for being indecent. This sparked the hashtag #MyDressMyChoice which in as much as it was a mechanism to try to stop the public shaming of women by the perpetrators of the stripping, it rubbed others the wrong way in one way or another. Many people online were attacked based on glorifying feminism, over those who deemed the act as violence against women. Political scrutiny is another domain that gives people the satisfaction to speak out on issues that the government is involved in. This obviously sparks conflict; especially, as stated before, between government supporters and the supporters of the opposition. Though on a smaller scale, the key informants stated that religious extremism is on the rise as an igniter for social media conflict, especially with the rising number of terrorism occurring in the world today.

When asked how social media conflict differs from traditional forms of conflict the key informants simply put it that online conflicts escalate quickly and wildly; that traditional confrontation was one on one and was not for the masses to dissect and analyze, hence conflict resolution was much easier that way where there was less interference from external sources. "Online conflict is immediate, fresh and mostly current. They are rarely prolonged. They also have immediate consequences." This means that because online posts are easier and faster to put up, they reach wider audiences instantly; online the exposure is bigger than traditional means hence more catastrophic. Social media conflict attracts greater attention and is universal eliciting

immediate reactions and instant gratification. The new media officer stated that, "It's easier. All you have to do hit 'Enter', and the damage is done. You can go back to eating your salad and move on with your day." Arguments are made in real time and the platform or audience is on a very wide or large scale.

The blogger added, that not only is social media conflict faster, but it can also remain anonymous, unlike traditional forms of conflict. She added that it promotes immediate response whereas some traditional forms of confrontation are not therefore the time between the exchange of "words" makes it possible for tempers to subside thereby diffusing conflict.

This means that the immediacy of response makes social media conflict more dangerous and spread more easily, where users are more malicious and less cognizant of consequences because they are hiding behind a screen. Also the fact that they do not expect immediate repercussions/reprimand adds to this. The ease of access to social media and lack of clear laws increases cases of conflicts.

The researcher wanted to find out from the key informants their take on cyber bullying and hate speech in the context of the work that they do. The social media officer stated that he was likely to witness cyber bullying and/or hate speech daily in his line of work because he frequently engages on social media platforms. He additionally stated that cyber bullying occurs because there is that mask that people are likely hiding behind that makes them brave enough to personally attack others. "I mean, if a girl can be condemned for sharing about how she was sexually assaulted...and another one attacked just because she was fat and dark skinned...these things openly happen on the internet rather than in public because people have more guts when they are on the computers or phones. If you are a normal human being, you wouldn't do that in

the open.” The new media officer stated that cyber bullying is mainly observed with celebrities; that anything they post is soon followed with hateful comments.

On hate speech, the informants unanimously agreed that in Kenya, politics is the source of it all. In all the cases that have arisen in mainstream media, where people have had action taken against them, majority of them have been politically fueled. They have consisted of hardline political statements that divide citizens along tribal lines. The social media officer identifies hate speech simply, “Moses Kuria, Moses Kuria and Moses Kuria.” They also stated that hate speech occurs heavily between politicians and another between prominent personalities and during political engagements and people get stereotypical and personal based on political personalities and ideologies. “Kenyan politics and online hate speech are synonymous”.

Asked what some of the resultant short and long term effects of online interpersonal conflict, the key informants stated that the level of the type of social media conflict that is projected, can have major or minor effects to those who are involved. The social media officer stated that some of the short term effects include “...where a user can delete the posts that are receiving hate or shut down his/her Facebook page or unsubscribe to their Twitter account...it is also as simple as ignoring the spiteful comments and moving on with your life”. These measures are often the simpler way out. Other short term effects of online interpersonal conflict include ceasing to engage in confrontations (for example, participating in online activism or even using hashtags that would elicit attention, such as #KOT (Kenyans on Twitter). Short term effects could decrease the credibility of some platforms where people would start to associate some accounts with false or controversial information simply from the number of hits of interpersonal confrontations that occur from their posts. “A page like Ghafla, it may have all the latest news

and a good number of subscribers, but you can catch me dead if I quote any information they post...there is always some drama there.”

The blogger, on advice to policy makers as far as online conflict is concerned, said that laws need to not only be put in place but made easily understandable and accessible to the public, especially since almost everyone uses social media. “The only reason I know what not to write or post on social media that would offend someone is the fact that I am bound by the ethics and morals of my profession...things I learnt in school, and I have picked up on the job. People talk badly on social media, and think they can get away with it because they do not know the boundaries.” This means that, in as much as there are some form of laws that exist, there lacks a mechanism to make people aware of this; there isn’t enough awareness. Another reason that lies with policy makers is weight of the repercussions of the perpetrators of online interpersonal conflict.

### **4.3 Discussions**

The study found out that regular use of social media based on the age of users and the current affairs in the society exposes people to online interpersonal conflict. With a majority of users below the age of 40, they are more aware of their technological needs and therefore are found to be the highest number to access online platforms for whatever use. This use in turn exposes them to the online community that is engaging every second on social media platforms. As stated by Al-Deen and Hendricks (2011) the accessibility, cheapness and ease of social media usage could be a factor that has made online interpersonal conflict more widespread as a means of lashing out at one another. Evolving social media platforms (like Instagram) are further exposing users to more exposure of ways they can be targets of online interpersonal confrontations.

The study also revealed that, trends and hashtags are likely to instigate social media conflict in that they bring to light what (or whom) people should be talking about. In this case, opinion makers are likely to be bashed, or in other scenarios be the bashers, when these trends escalate. Hashtags make online conversations more visible therefore highlighting the footprint of conflict where it sparks. This could (de)escalate conflict where a lot of momentum is generated, depending on certain timelines. This ability for people to "come together and form a public to discuss, engage in critical rational debate and form a public opinion" was unearthed by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991). Social media as a new communication space is now specified as a public 'sphere' where the private middle-class come together to articulate the needs of society with the state.

The study brought to light that conflict is rampant on social media where people play the role of participants or targets based on the issues that arises or are up for discussion. That there are various types or forms based on the platform, topic, means of posting, intensity, period (timeline), association, etc. The study also showed that the age difference between users causes some conflict online, as well as education level and social standing (status). These differences also rub off in the virtual space of the internet, as they would in real life, only that online, there are higher stakes at play because users can falsify their information to seem older, more learned or affluent – respectively.

The study established that social media offers a façade, where people are more likely to initiate and escalate conflict based on the perception that there is lack of actual face-to-face communication. Goffman (1959) expands this understanding of the "identity cues we share with others, both intentionally and unintentionally" in his work on self-presentation. Users hide behind the mask of the internet, from in the comfort of their homes, lash out at people that they

know or may not know just because the platform avails itself. The study also revealed that there is also some safety in the usage of social media to trigger and fuel conflict in that, one cannot get caught or there are no repercussions taken, as opposed to physical contact where one can be detained for verbal or physical abuse. On the other hand, there is no safety offered online to those users who feel that their opinions will be used against them even if they mean well, hence they do not take part in any form of posting or engagement.

The study majorly exposed that online interpersonal conflict arises from differing political views where users often have clashing opinions on political matters; mostly government vs. opposition. Even though the respondents highly stated that they were unlikely to engage in political confrontations online, most stated that they are likely to be direct on political views online. Majority of the examples of online interpersonal conflict were political in nature and it is safe to say that Kenyans identify hate speech, online, with politics. Moses Kuria could be a symbol of political [online] conflict in Kenya based on the number of times his examples came up. The study also discovered that there should be regulations put in place to decrease the political interpersonal conflicts that take place on social media, but by independent bodies (if not by self or the social media platforms themselves), as governmental agencies would present a conflict of interest.

The study revealed that religious interpersonal conflict was almost equal in occurrence to politically stimulated online conflict. That religious online conflict is pivoted on the difference in opinion; attacks are based on users' beliefs and what they deem to be right over others. Religious online interpersonal conflict has also contributed to some form of extremism and radicalization based on reasons stated above on the accessibility to social media, and the frequency of use.

The study wrought out that although there are other types of social media conflict, political and religious were the most identifiable. The key informants made it apparent that cyberbullying and hate speech are the anchors of these types of conflicts, and the intensity to which they occur dictates the short and long term effects of their prevalence. The study also found out that there is no mechanism for online conflict resolution as there would be in traditional forms of conflict where people would calmly sit down and iron out any disagreements, especially with mediators present.

The study finally revealed that that there are no direct laws that speak to online interpersonal conflict, and ways in which they can be stopped or compensated. That of those who have been detained for perpetrating some types of online conflict have been either been charged shoddily, or dismissed poorly. This in turn reflects to the majority of social media users that there are no bounds to what is said online and that one can get away for instigating any type of online conflict. That if any laws exist, they should be made aware to these users.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary

The study was conducted with an aim of achieving the objectives of the ways in which Facebook and Twitter are used as social media platforms to instigate interpersonal conflict and why do users engage in online conflict as opposed to ‘traditional’/offline confrontations. The study also hoped to find out the levels and most common types of online interpersonal conflicts and the ideologies that perpetuate social media confrontations.

Facebook and Twitter, being social media platforms that allow people to openly share information directly – through newsfeeds and timelines – and indirectly – through direct messaging and inboxes, have presented a new way in which people can exist interpersonally as opposed to other traditional means like face-to-face communication. This has in turn enabled these platforms to also be used to propagate conflict.

Most of the respondents said that on Facebook, users often engage in conflict through the comment section where people often write to either support or oppose the opinion of the one who has posted an idea. This is more evident in posts that are political, where a user gives his opinion on a current state of affairs of the politics of the country. Depending on who the user supports, a post will have numerous comments that will agree or disagree – the later creating a rift.

Most of the respondents who were surveyed said that Twitter’s mechanism for conflict escalation is the mass ganging up of users based on the use of the hashtag. A hashtag can go viral in seconds, and the more controversial the topic is, the more likely it is to garner hits. When this

occurs towards a particular person, it is then when interpersonal conflict is realized, through bashing and/or invasion of privacy.

Facebook and Twitter brings people's lives to the fore based on the profiles they create of themselves on these platforms. Despite this, most of the social media users said that the internet has provided a mask where people are more likely to instigate conflict because they will remain unknown, and no repercussions will follow. This is evident where/when private or compromising photos are shared on these platforms without the source being determined.

Most of the respondents stated that the levels at which social media conflict exists depends on the intensity of the intended message as well as the type of conflict. Most stated that the impact could be short or long term; and could be subtle or elaborate. There are cases of cyberbullying that have caused some users to commit suicide, while there are incidents of hate speech that have never incited people to do anything about what was said, nor been brought to the attention of authorities.

On the types of online interpersonal conflict, most of the respondents said that a difference in opinion is the major contribution that determines why and when people become defensive – often based on social status, age and education level. Politics and religion were outlined as the factors that fuel this. They also mentioned that personal forms of online interpersonal conflicts are rampant, where people attack others just based on their position and vulnerability, such as the so called socialites and celebrities.

Most of the respondents who were surveyed said that politics has given a new edge to the use of social media, in that the latter is now a platform to exercise ones affiliation to whatever party, and in the process, shove their animosity towards those who have different opinions. Religion

and the way we perceive each other's faiths has also made it easy for views expressed on social media on the subject a target for interpersonal conflict as well as general engagements through extremism and radicalization. Social media has enabled a concrete rift among different faiths due to the messages that are out there.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

### **5.2.1 Social Media is the New Battlefield for Interpersonal Conflict**

Fueled by the notion of anonymity, this study shows that social media conflict exists and is quite rampant in the virtual world. For as long as people are interacting online, and especially with the façade of being unseen, these conflicts will continue to be perpetuated for as long as there are no restrictions, repercussions or resolutions that take place. Social media offers a backstage, considered a sort of "private area where individuals can be themselves and drop their societal roles and identities" (Ritzer, 2008), unlike public settings (front stages) where they try to convey a specific impression to the public. This has enabled social media to emerge as the new battlefield for interpersonal conflict by presenting new opportunities for stepping out of character, where a user freely engages with someone whom he/she would not attack in the open. We learn that, based on the arguments, social media can be considered as a new way in which people now propagate conflict devoid of the repercussions that may follow, if any.

Social media is the new public sphere as defined by Habermas where individuals come to debate public affairs before what is believed to be an informed and reasoning public. According to this, the sphere is created because of the basic right of freedom of expression which help to encourage and maintain a diversity of opinions, which is central to the operation of social media's free flow of information and communication. Where traditional forms of conflict sought different forms of

resolve, like the involvement of mediators, online conflict lacks in this capacity based perhaps on the types of platforms it presents itself and/or the lack of regulations that govern this space. Social media has arisen as the new battlefield for interpersonal confrontations based on not only anonymity, but the fact that no ground rules has been particularly set on this *new* form of media as the legal frameworks that are in place do not holistically govern the virtual world. Additionally, with the evolution of social media and the way people interact on the internet (brought about by the advancement of technology), the ways in which online conflict manifests can be hard to arrest as this would require constant monitoring of the outlets, the topics and the interpretation of the intensity of the conflicts that emerge.

### **5.2.2 Social Media Should Be Regulated**

Since social media generates public interest resulting from conversations surrounding current affairs, with platforms acting as forums where users interrogate and debate issues of public concern, the free flow of information enables for all public opinions to be unrestrictedly aired as most posts are published without filtering or editing. This study has revealed that social media needs to be regulated as it poses a challenge to existing traditional media legal frameworks, policies and regulations based on the type of medium and on national borders. It also elicits new legal issues particularly with regard to freedom of expression, privacy/access and service provision.

The spread of the internet has encouraged public discourse in enhancing debates about the current state of affairs not only in public but among people. Social media should be regulated in order to protect users who are genuinely engage in online spaces for positive functions such as education, marketing and basic information. These are users who based on the correct information they provide for the creation of their profiles, are out to receive the same; that the

information they receive from their engagement is void of deception and deceit as the potential for abuse of private information online has become an increasing concern.

As social media usage becomes widespread, the possibility of using it improperly should prompt policymakers to establish guidelines and enforce compliance. All industries should aspire to stay current on regulatory guidelines that govern them by having solid social media policies in place.

### **5.2.3 There are Various Types and Levels of Online Interpersonal Conflict**

The study concludes that online religious conflict is no better than online political conflict; that they are both extreme representations of interpersonal conflict propagated through social media – their extents which vary in damage. Political and religious hostilities are a feature of acute forms of conflict in many societies.

Social media platforms, as previously discussed, make it an apparent space for political expression to occur through ease of accessibility and the interaction with hundreds of people simultaneously; that and the possibility of further sharing and increasing of messages, allows users to put across information to large audiences. The possibility of a diverse audience on these platforms means that the message reaches those whose opinions differ and who are less likely to interact face-to-face. Posts that convey political views on social media platforms may result in heated debates which may offend audiences and even damaged relationships. The challenges of conducting political discussions online may aggravate during times of high-intensity political conflict, in which controversy and disagreement rise, while tolerance and acceptance decline (Huckfeldt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2004). In comparison, since religion is a central part of many individuals' identity it is often a contentious issue. "Any threat to one's beliefs is a threat to one's

very being", and this can spark interpersonal conflict. On social media platforms, the problem is not about difference of religion as such but ideology and assertive modes of thinking and opinions. Since it is an ungovernable space, social media reflects the full range of ideological and religious beliefs.

### **5.3 The Role of Communication**

Communication is key in driving the realization of the above mentioned conclusions by offering solutions towards the correct usage of social media, parallel to that of traditional media, in order to enhance its better qualities over the disadvantages. Communication studies can also assist in achievement of guidelines on the establishment of laws and policies for the effective use of social media platforms. It can also be key in demonstrating that media platforms can in turn be used towards conflict de-escalation and resolution through the right channels and means.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

#### **i) To social media users**

Social media users should be weary of the messages that they send out through their profiles as with ongoing technological advancement, it is going to be easier to track the source of conflict-generating posts. They should also refrain from starting or contributing to topics or comments that will incite other users, acting as self-regulators.

#### **ii) To social media officers**

Social media officers should make it their priority to uphold the highest ethical and professional standards so that their work is credible and less prone to draw or showcase conflict. They should

be an example to the mainstream social media users since they come from the profession, and should promote the values of the good uses of social media.

**iii) To policy makers**

As technology is fast advancing, there is need for some regulation imposed on social media users who breach the stipulations in the Constitution towards invasion of privacy and freedom of expression. Laws need to be formulated that will speak to the use of online platforms, and not the equipment itself.

**iv) To academics**

There is need to revisit curriculum that teaches on media and the law, in order to streamline the use and the repercussions from an early stage. Sensitization of this also needs to be done in institutions where social media is used as a business tool, and where experts are hired to run and maintain social media platforms.

**5.5 Suggestion for Further Research**

A study should be conducted on social media and conflict resolution, and how these platforms can be used to reduce and/stop interpersonal online conflict, especially those drawn on political lines.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Questionnaire for Social Media Users

My name is Angellah Khamala, a student pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Communication Studies (Development Communication) at the University of Nairobi - School of Journalism. As part of my course requirement, I am undertaking a study to establish The Types and Levels of Online Interpersonal Conflicts posed by the use of Social Media. The findings of this study will be used for academic purposes and/or to identify gaps and propose solutions.

This questionnaire is therefore intended to seek your views on the various aspects of social media usage and conflict escalation. Kindly fill it with all sincerity and honesty. The information you provide will be utilized purely for academic purposes and will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

#### SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Name: .....  
(optional)
2. Gender:    Male             Female
3. Age:  
    20 – 25 years   
    26 – 30 years   
    31 – 35 years   
    36 – 40 years   
    41 – 45 years   
    46 – 50 years   
    Above 50
4. Highest education level:  
    Postgraduate     Degree     Diploma     High School

#### SECTION B: SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

1. Which social media platforms are you **subscribed** to?  
    Facebook             Twitter             WhatsApp             Snapchat

LinkedIn       Skype       Google+       Instagram   
 YouTube       Pinterest       Others: .....

2. Which social media platforms do you **access frequently**?

Facebook       Twitter       WhatsApp       Snapchat   
 LinkedIn       Skype       Google+       Instagram   
 YouTube       Pinterest       Others: .....

3. How frequently do you access social media?

Less than hourly       Hourly       Every 6 – 8 hours   
 Every 12 hours       Once a day       Every two days   
 Once a week       Every two weeks       Other: .....

4. How do you access your social media pages? Via (tick all options that apply),

Mobile/smartphone       Computer/laptop       Other: .....

5. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, please rate your reason for usage of social media (tick accordingly):

USE	1	2	3	4	5
Communication					
Marketing					
Information/News					
Entertainment					
Publicity (self or brand)					

6. Can you think of any other reasons for the use of social media?

.....  
 .....

7. How many friends do you have on **Facebook**?

- 0-50
- 51-100
- 101-150
- 151-200
- 201-300

301-400

401-500

501-600

601-700

701-800

801-900

901-1000

1001-2000

2001-3000

3001-4000

4001-5000

More than 5000

8. How many followers do you have on **Twitter**?

0-100

101-200

201-300

301-400

401-500

501-1000

1001-2000

2001-3000

3001-4000

4001-5000

More than 5000

9. How many people are you following on Twitter?

0-100

101-200

201-300

301-400

- 401-500
- 501-1000
- 1001-2000
- 2001-3000
- 3001-4000
- 4001-5000
- More than 5000

10. What are the 3 top hashtags that have stood out to you on Facebook or Twitter?

- (i) .....
- (ii) .....
- (iii) .....

11. What are the 3 most prominent handles that you engage with/come across on Twitter?

- (i) .....
- (ii) .....
- (iii) .....

**SECTION C: ONLINE CONFLICT**

1. Have you ever come across conflict on social media?

- Yes  No

2. Have you ever been a target or participated in online conflict, or both?

- Yes  as a target ; as a participant  Both  No

3. What are some of the types of social media/online conflict that you know of?

- (i) .....
- (ii) .....
- (iii).....

4. Do you think that age difference among users is a factor that contributes to online interpersonal conflict?

- Yes  No

5. Explain the reason for your answer above

.....

.....

.....

6. Do you feel safe to engage in online confrontations?

Yes  No

7. Do you think that accessibility to social media platforms makes it favourable for social media conflict to take place?

Yes  No

8. Explain the reason for your answer above.

.....  
.....  
.....

9. Do you think that differing social classes\relationships among users is a factor that contributes to online interpersonal conflict?

Yes  No

10. Explain the reason for your answer above

.....  
.....  
.....

11. Do you think that education level among peers\users is a factor that contributes to online interpersonal conflict?

Yes  No

12. Explain the reason for your answer above

.....  
.....  
.....

13. Are you likely to carry out social media conflict based on political interests?

Yes  No

14. Are you likely to be direct on political views online?

Yes  No

15. Do you think online political conflicts should be regulated?

Yes  No

16. If yes, by whom and how?

.....  
.....  
.....  
17. What is your assessment of online religious conflict; how does it manifest?

.....  
.....  
.....

18. How do you compare online interpersonal religious conflict with political conflict?

.....  
.....  
.....

19. Can you think of other reasons that would cause online interpersonal conflict?

.....  
.....  
.....

20. How is online conflict different from traditional forms of confrontation (e.g., mailed letters); explain:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

21. Do people who engage in online interpersonal conflict ever meet face-to-face?

Yes                       No

22. On a scale of 0 to 5, please rate your encounters or experience with the following forms of online conflict ('0' being equivalent to 'no'):

Hate speech \_\_\_\_\_                      Cyberbullying \_\_\_\_\_

23. Can you think of an instance where you witnessed and/or experienced cyber bullying?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

24. What are some of the cases that come to mind when you think about online hate speech?

.....  
.....  
.....

25. Based on experience, how do people in your office/school deal with interpersonal confrontations; what channels do they use (apart from online)?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

26. On a scale of 0 to 5, to what extent do you think that the law is enforced towards those who carry out social media conflict ('0' being equivalent to 'no'):

\_\_\_\_\_

27. Are you aware of any laws that prohibit online conflict (cyber bullying and/or hate speech) in Kenya?

Yes  No

28. Are there incidents of online conflict resolution?

Yes  No

29. Are there mediators for conflict resolution online?

Yes  No

30. Please explain your answers for online conflict resolution and mediation.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION**

## **Appendix II: Interview Guide for Social Media Officers/Enthusiasts**

My name is Angellah Khamala, a student pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Communication Studies (Development Communication) at the University of Nairobi - School of Journalism. As part of my course requirement, I am undertaking a study to establish The Types and Levels of Online Interpersonal Conflicts posed by the use of Social Media. The findings of this study will be used for academic purposes and/or to identify gaps and propose solutions.

This interview is therefore intended to seek your views on the various aspects of social media usage and conflict escalation. Kindly respond with all sincerity and honesty. The information you provide will be utilized purely for academic purposes and will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

### **SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHICS**

1. Name: .....  
(optional)

2. Gender:  
Male  Female

3. Highest education level:  
Postgraduate  Degree  Diploma  High School

4. Title: .....

5. Years of experience:  
0-2  6-10   
3-5  More than 10

6. Area of expertise: .....

## **SECTION B: SOCIAL MEDIA & CONFLICT**

1. What are the major uses of social media today?
2. What are some of the types of social media conflict you have experienced/witnessed?
3. What can you say are the levels of social media conflicts that exist today?
4. What are some of the reasons or motivations that people indulge in social media conflicts?
5. Who are more inclined to carry out social media confrontations?
6. What are some of the major ideologies that drive perpetrators of online interpersonal conflict?
7. How is social media conflict different from *traditional* forms of conflict?
8. Un-package cyberbullying and hate speech in the context of the work that you do.
9. What are some of the resultant short and long term effects of online interpersonal conflict?
10. What would be your advice to policy makers as far as online conflict is concerned?

**Appendix III: Certificate of Field Work**



**UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES  
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM & MASS COMMUNICATION**

Telegram: Journalism Varsity Nairobi  
Telephone: 254-02-3318262, Ext. 28060, 28061  
Director's Office: 254-02-2314201 (Direct Line)  
Telex: 22095 Fax: 254-02-245666  
Email: [director-soj@uonbi.ac.ke](mailto:director-soj@uonbi.ac.ke)

P.O. Box 30197-00100  
Nairobi, GPO  
Kenya

**REF: CERTIFICATE OF FIELD WORK**

This is to certify that all corrections proposed at the Board of Examiners' meeting held on 02/05/2015 in respect of M.A/Ph.D final Project/Thesis defence have been effected to my/our satisfaction and the student can be allowed to proceed for field work.

Reg. No: K50/69602/2013

Name: Angella M. Khamala

Title: Social Media: The New Interpersonal Battleground? The Types and Levels of Online Interpersonal Conflicts

Dr E. Mookwa  
SUPERVISOR

[Signature]  
SIGNATURE

11/5/2015  
DATE

Dr Samuel Sirugi  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

[Signature]  
SIGNATURE

11/5/2015  
DATE

Dr. Weth Ndati  
DIRECTOR

[Signature]  
SIGNATURE/STAMP

11.11.2016  
DATE



**Appendix IV: Certificate of Corrections**



**UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES  
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM & MASS COMMUNICATION**

Telegram: Journalism Varsity Nairobi  
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P.O. Box 30197-00100  
Nairobi, GPO  
Kenya

**REF: CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTIONS**

This is to certify that all corrections proposed at the Board of Examiners meeting held on 28/10/2016 in respect of M.A/PhD. Project/Thesis Proposal defence have been effected to my/our satisfaction and the project can now be prepared for binding.

Reg. No: K50/69602/2013

Name: Angella M. Khamala

Title: Social Media: The New Interpersonal

Battlefield? The Types and Levels of Online Interpersonal Conflicts

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
SUPERVISOR

Dr. E. M. M. M. M.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE

9/11/2016  
\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

Dr. Samuel Spring  
\_\_\_\_\_  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

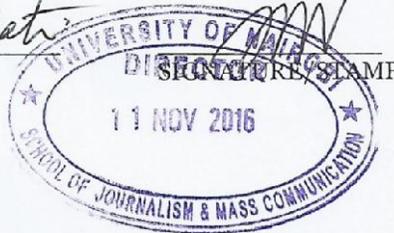
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11/11/2016  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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Dr. Neethi Neethi  
\_\_\_\_\_  
DIRECTOR

[Signature]  
\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE

11/11/2016  
\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE



## Appendix V: Originality Report

### Turnitin Originality Report

SOCIAL MEDIA: THE NEW INTERPERSONAL BATTLEFIELD? THE TYPES AND LEVELS OF ONLINE INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS by Angellah M. Khamalaregistration Number: K50/69602/  
From Project Final & Corrections (MA Communication theory)

- Processed on 07-Nov-2016 08:46 EAT
- ID: 733226312
- Word Count: 21237

### Similarity Index

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1% match (Internet from 28-Sep-2011) <a href="http://marcstumpel.wordpress.com/category/uncategorized/">http://marcstumpel.wordpress.com/category/uncategorized/</a>	4
< 1% match (Internet from 04-Jan-2013) <a href="http://www.dm-world.net/forum/archive/index.php/t-147.html?s=">http://www.dm-world.net/forum/archive/index.php/t-147.html?s=</a>	5
< 1% match (Internet from 05-Oct-2016) <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snapchat">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snapchat</a>	6
< 1% match (Internet from 03-Feb-2008) <a href="http://www.mala.bc.ca/~soules/media301/habermas.htm">http://www.mala.bc.ca/~soules/media301/habermas.htm</a>	7
< 1% match (Internet from 12-Oct-2016) <a href="http://www.lawupdater.com/wp/2016/04/21/does-freedom-of-speech-give-people-the-right-to-use-hate-speech/">http://www.lawupdater.com/wp/2016/04/21/does-freedom-of-speech-give-people-the-right-to-use-hate-speech/</a>	8
< 1% match (Internet from 06-Dec-2012) <a href="http://www.tfccalert.com/media/Social-Media-for-Emergency-Managers.pdf">http://www.tfccalert.com/media/Social-Media-for-Emergency-Managers.pdf</a>	



## Appendix VI: Declaration of Originality Form

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

### Declaration of Originality Form

This form must be completed and signed for all works submitted to the University for examination.

Name of Student ANGELLA M. KHAMALA

Registration Number K50/69602/2013

College HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Faculty/School/Institute JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

Department \_\_\_\_\_

Course Name M.A COMMUNICATION STUDIES

Title of the work SOCIAL MEDIA: THE NEW INTERPERSONAL BATTLEFIELD?  
THE TYPES AND LEVELS OF ONLINE INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS

#### DECLARATION

1. I understand what Plagiarism is and I am aware of the University's policy in this regard
2. I declare that this MASTERS PROJECT (Thesis, project, essay, assignment, paper, report, etc) is my original work and has not been submitted elsewhere for examination, award of a degree or publication. Where other people's work, or my own work has been used, this has properly been acknowledged and referenced in accordance with the University of Nairobi's requirements.
3. I have not sought or used the services of any professional agencies to produce this work
4. I have not allowed, and shall not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his/her own work
5. I understand that any false claim in respect of this work shall result in disciplinary action, in accordance with University Plagiarism Policy.

Signature Angella M. Khamala

Date 10/11/2016.

