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Abstract

Social media among young people in Kenya: Crossing ethnic borders

Internet, mobile phones and now recently the social media have revolutionized how young people in Africa are communicating. From having had to rely on the stories from mainstream media, the people, especially the young ones, are using social media as an arena to communicate across borders that previously were much more difficult to cross.

The research question is “How do the use of social media among young people in Kenya influence the relationship and understanding across ethnic boundaries?” Smart phones, especially among the young people are used for communication, through Facebook, Twitter, dating web sites, and chatting services like yahoo messenger, and the very popular text messaging and file sharing application called WhatsApp as well as the free calling application Viber.

There was also a great difference between the younger generation and the older generation in their use of internet cafes, from 30 years of age and upwards. The older generation used the internet cafes as their “office”, as they came to copy important papers, like CVs, and typing and printing papers, like application for jobs etc. Those below 30 used the cafes as their offices as well, but also for checking their social media, such as Facebook, even if they had a smart phone or not.

Some of the findings suggest that there is an emerging awareness among the younger generation that the different ethnic groups have to engage more directly. The paper suggests that social media are able to decrease the tensions between the ethnic groups, and linking them to the global society as well.

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