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How social media is/was used in election

Media plays a critical role in the development and expansion of the democratic spaces in Kenya. High penetration of the internet has led to easy access and use of social media platforms by youths who account for a larger percentage of the population in Kenya. New media therefore has shifted and changed the way politicians interact with their followers. Through these platforms, politicians reach out directly to their followers, campaigning and selling manifestos. New media has overturned the traditional ways of political campaigns and opened up a level playing field where all politicians have equal chances and can speak directly to the electorate. On one hand, more voters now have access to various sources of information and freedom to express their opinion without any censorship or gatekeepers to influence them. On the other hand, citizens have become digitally literate, civically engaged, and more likely to hold the politicians accountable.

In 2017, social media was widely used in shaping the opinion of the Kenyan voters. It was used to varied forms of civil engagement including online protests that were characterised by political contests and outbursts of anger and backlash, protest messages that turned into humorous viral memes, hashtags on trending topics and actors. However, with a global pandemic (COVID-19) a lot has changed in terms of restricted political rallies and limited movements. Internet usage surged during Covid-19 and this has accelerated digital transformation. It is evident that social media has and will play a critical role in upcoming elections by shaping the opinions and breaking control of the incumbency over the electoral process. This paper therefore seeks to analyse the social media political discourses of various publics, examine how politicians have used social media in political campaigns, and assess the impact of social media on democracy.

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