

Use Of Social Media Among The Agricultural Based Non-Governmental Organizations In Kenya

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Abstract: The use and importance of social media across all sectors of economy cannot be underestimated. The main research objective in this study was to identify the use of social media among the agricultural based Non-Governmental Organizations in Kenya. The uses and gratification theory was adopted to help answer the questions “how” and “why” social media can be appropriate in a Non-governmental organization environment. Qualitative design has been used in the study to explore and explain how and why social media platforms are used in NGOs. The study has used the qualitative research design since it’s a form of social action that stresses on the way people interpret, and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals. Secondary data has been used to identify the use of social media among the agricultural based Non-Governmental Organizations in Kenya. The findings indicate that there are many social media platforms being used in agricultural extension service delivery worldwide with Facebook having highest popularity (64.7%). Most of the agricultural stakeholders using social media are versatile users (33.5%) who usually visit only to find information. The roles of social media among the agricultural NGOs include the quick delivery and response to information between the receiver and sender. This ensures an effective way of ensuring successful delivery and sustainability of a viable agricultural extension subsector as well as fostering a fast platform for information dissemination and interactive contact; rivalled by none in this time. Some of the reasons behind the use of social media include the higher degree of penetration coupled with the level of technology advancements that continue to bring world at everyone’s finger tips and make information accessible without having to go through hiccups of travelling and delays. Social media platforms are also capable of educating and informing on agricultural matters as well as facilitating the buying and selling of agricultural produce and related products. However, the use of social media has its challenges too. Some of them are lack of regulation leading to spread of false information and rumors. The platforms can also detach a farmer, extension worker or any other professional in the line, rather than facilitate salient physical interactions which are indispensable for proper networking and ultimate development. Other challenges as observed include poor network access, power outages, and costly charges when accessing the internet. The study will enlighten the business organizations, government agencies, and private entities on the role social media play in communication sector while cutting down communication costs. The study will also shed more light to researchers and scholars interested in understanding the importance of social media as a medium of communication.

Keywords: Social Media, Non-Governmental Organizations, communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Information is necessary for enlightening people in a society. People rely on the information shared to meet their short and long term needs. As a result, different means of communication are vital in sharing different types of

information that will help the masses solve their problems and also influence their decision making processes.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Communication functions in a number of ways to determine group outcome. It is a means of sharing information

and it is the way group members explore and identify errors in thinking, it is a tool of persuasion (Foss & LittleJohn, 2008).

Haneef, M., & Shaheen, A., (2014), adds that communication should be the important part of the development plan and its main objective is to create systems, modes and strategies that could provide opportunities for the people to understand the development project easily and they can get maximum benefits from the development project and can improve their lives.

SOCIAL MEDIA

According to Afrad and Barau (2017), Social media are a contemporary channel of digital communication that is composed of various evolving tools for discussion, interaction and sharing of information among people. These digital tools include among others Facebook, Twitter, Farmbook, WhatsApp, ResearchGate etc.

Merriam-Webster (2015) defines social media as forms of electronic communication through which users can create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content. Terry (2009) and, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) stated, basically social media comprise of digital technologies that facilitate communication of user generated content through continuous interaction.

In a nut shell, Suchiradipta & Saravanan (2016) defined social media as web based tools of electronic communication that allow users to interact, create, share, retrieve and exchange information and ideas in any form (text, pictures, video, etc.) that can be discussed upon, archived and used by anyone in virtual communities and networks.

ROLE OF NGOS IN COMMUNICATION

Hue Trong Duong, (2017), indicates that communication in nonprofit organizations is “a matter of informing [a] target audience about the alter-natives for action, the positive consequences for choosing a particular one, and the motivation for acting (and often continuing to act) in a particular way.”

The web brings the organizations members to a relational space together and can be a relevant channel for NGOs to communicate their messages and erect public support for confronting issues (Kang & Norton, 2004).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Referring to Haneef, M., & Shaheen, A., (2014), Communication should be the important part of the development plan and mobilizing the community because its main objective is to create systems, modes and strategies that could provide opportunities for the people to understand the development project easily and they can get maximum benefits from the development project and can improve their lives.

However, communication via broadcast media is a multifaceted process consuming a number of resources like time, money and energy to the advertiser. Keegan et al (1992), claims that limited availability of slots, short advertisement life in that once the advertisement has been aired, the

consumers who missed the advert are lost and the lack of well-defined segments due to its reach to a wide audience make it hard for advertisers who wish to focus on one group are some of the reasons put forward as limiting in the use of television.

Fajen (1978) states that the disadvantages of radio medium are that there is no visual treatment, short advertising life of messages, commercial clutter and limited demographic selectivity in that the same message is transmitted to all without regard to consumer differences.

As a resort, NGOs in addition to other strategies of communication, use social media to communicate both to their internal and external audiences thus sealing the gap created by other means of communication. Its quick access, availability, low cost and ease of use has made it popular in the communication field.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the use of social media among the agricultural based Non-Governmental Organizations in communicating to both internal and external audiences. In this context, the internal audiences of the NGOs refers to its employees, both permanent and casual, while external audiences refers to farmers, donors and other stakeholders. This will help the researcher determine the alternative communication strategies, such as social media, that can be used by agriculture-based NGOs in spreading information to their immediate stakeholders.

OBJECTIVES

To identify the types of social media used among the agricultural NGOs.

To ascertain the roles of social media among the agricultural NGOs.

To determine the reasons behind the use of social media.

To examine the challenges experienced in the use of social media among the NGOs.

JUSTIFICATION

This research study is important because it will try to unearth the importance of social media as used by agricultural based NGOs in streamlining and effecting communication processes within and outside the organization. As a result, the study will examine the reasons behind the use of social media amidst the prevalence of other means of communication like phone calls, emails, television, radio, posters, memos, just to mention a few. This will create an understanding of the basic communication strategies that NGOs use to communicate their messages and unearth the communication strategies that can be most effective for their audience.

The study will be useful in acting as a game changer to business organizations, government agencies, and private entities who spend huge amounts of money in communicating information to their clients and immediate stakeholders. It will also inform researchers and scholars who will be interested in understanding the importance of social media as a medium of communication.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study will adopt the Uses and gratifications theory. The theory will be appropriate as professed by Tan (1984) that media is goal oriented and is used to satisfy specific needs as developed by the social environment.

He further says that receivers select the types of media and media contents to fulfill their needs. Thus, the audience initiates the mass communication process and are able to 'bend the media' to their needs more readily than the media can overpower them. This theory of uses and gratifications was propounded by theorists Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gureitch in 1974.

One of the successful theoretical frameworks to examine questions of "how" and "why" individuals use media to satisfy particular needs has been the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory. The theory has been quite successful in understanding consumers' motivations and behaviors in the context of traditional media such as radio and TV, Karimi, L., et al., (2014).

The researchers, Karimi, L., et al., (2014), further submits, the extensive distribution and growth of Social Network Sites (SNSs), has drawn the attention of researchers, leading to a wide range of studies focusing on uses and social implications of SNSs. In this regard, researchers are using the U&G theory to provide an explanation on what makes this new form of media to be so enticing, what motivated users to join in SNSs and the gratifications received from ongoing use. Applying the U&G theory to SNSs is of vital importance in today's mass communication research because this form of mass media is relatively new in relation to radio, television, and film.

II. METHODOLOGY

According to Polkinghorne (2005), qualitative design is exploratory, and seeks to explain 'how' and 'why' a particular social phenomenon, or program, operates as it does in a particular context. It tries to help us to understand the social world in which we live, and why things are the way they are. As a result, the design will help identify the types of social media used among the agricultural NGOs, ascertain the roles of social media, determine the reasons behind the use of social media and examine the challenges experienced in the use of social media.

Zohrabi, (2013), affirms that qualitative research is a form of social action that stresses on the way of people interpret, and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals. It makes the use of interviews, diaries, journals, classroom observations and immersions; and open-ended questionnaires to obtain, analyze, and interpret the data content analysis of visual and textual materials, and oral history.

The study will use secondary data to identify the use of social media among the agricultural based Non-Governmental Organizations in Kenya. Melissa, P., 2014, finds that secondary data analysis is analysis of data that was collected by someone else for another primary purpose. The utilization of this existing data provides a viable option for researchers

who may have limited time and resources. Secondary analysis is an empirical exercise that applies the same basic research principles as studies utilizing primary data and has steps to be followed just as any research method. This paper asserts that secondary data analysis is a viable method to utilize in the process of inquiry when a systematic process is followed.

III. FINDINGS

The findings of the study from the secondary data are as enumerated below.

TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA USED IN AGRICULTURAL NGOS

Afrad & Barau (2017), observes that there are many social media platforms being used in agricultural extension service delivery worldwide with Facebook having highest popularity (64.7%). Most of the agricultural stakeholders using social media are versatile users (33.5%) who usually visit only to find information.

Recently, there has been a tremendous increase in the usage of social media in the agricultural sector. Sokoya et al. (2012) discoursed that there is climbing increase in the utilization of social media among agricultural researchers, professionals and other stakeholders in the agricultural sector.

Zerfass et al., (2012), in their study which included 1146 PR professionals from 43 countries, estimated that in 2014 social media would be a dominant channel and instrument for addressing stakeholders, gatekeepers and audiences, right alongside online communication and online media. It was expected that during the period of 2012-2014 this communication channel would grow by as much as 37%, which is a higher growth rate than any of the communication channels analyzed. Among the communication tools of social media, it is estimated that online communities (social media) are the leading platforms in terms of their significance for communication management.

The increase in the availability of the internet connections and great popularity of Facebook among the internet users in Serbia opens up opportunities for non-governmental organizations to improve relations with their stake-holders through online communications in order to increase transparency, inform the public about current issues the organization is dealing with, provide additional material and human resources for achievement of their goals, and establish and strengthen relationships with stakeholders by means of interaction, Pavlovic, J., et al., (2014).

OTHER STRATEGIC NGOS COMMUNICATIONS

In addition to use of social media, NGOs use other strategic communications to reach out to farmers. Haneef, M., & Shaheen, A., (2014), observes that effective communication strategy is essential for the success of any project, whether it is started by the Government or any Non-Governmental Organization. Communication strategy is designed around the goals of a project that's why it varies from project to project. Similar findings are shared by Hue Trong Duong, (2017), who

submits that strategic communication emerges when an organization purposefully uses communication to reach its goals. It entails “how an organization communicates across organizational endeavors. The emphasis is on the strategic application of communication and how an organization functions as a social actor to advance its mission”.

On the other hand, the researchers Haneef, M., & Shaheen, A., (2014), indicates that bad or weak communication strategy could not convey the message properly and it could create problems for the mobilization process. A respondent in their research said, “Communication strategy has a key role. There should not be any gap between community and mobilizer; a good communication strategy can fill this gap.”

However, Segal Family Foundation, (2014), propounds that communicators should set measurable benchmarks throughout their communications effort to evaluate whether they are achieving their goals. Evaluating your communications strategies and tactics will improve the effectiveness of your communications and ensure that your organization is connecting with your key audiences and that your messages are resonating with them.

Back in the mid-nineties in the U.S.A, non-governmental organizations began to develop their presence on the internet and to adopt new technologies, using them in their daily work and communication with various target audiences, Pavlovic, J., et al., (2014).

According to a recent research carried out in Kenya dubbed “*Efficiency of Farm Concern International’s communication strategies in promoting African indigenous vegetables,*” results indicates that the literacy level of recipients determines the type of communication strategies used by NGOs.

Farm Concern International (FCI) mostly used *barazas* at 61%, demonstrations 30% and use of projector 9%. None of the trainings conducted by the organization used drama or media programmes. *Baraza* is a Swahili word meaning a sitting forum to discuss an important issue affecting a community. Under this context of communication, a *baraza* is a form of Ora-media and has some advantages over the use of radio. Its high participatory nature between the communicator and the audience elicits quick response and necessary action as seen in the production, consumption and commercialization of African Indigenous Vegetables (AIVs), Kuria, J., (2015).

However, Kuria, J., (2015) observes that, majority 64% of the respondents preferred demonstration which they cited was simpler because it entailed much of practical work than theory. It should also be noted that majority, 63%, had only basic education while 5% had no formal education and this could have contributed to their choice of method of communication. Only 36% preferred the use of *barazas* while none preferred the use of projector method. Other means of communication like main stream media, internet, posters and bill boards were not used to promote AIVs among farmers.

Haneef, M., & Shaheen, A., (2014), notices that use of lectures and face to face discussions to convey the message and interpersonal communication is more successful when used in community mobilization. People gives more attention to the word of mouth than the written literature. One reason of using more verbal communication was that the majority of

people belonged to poor areas and they were illiterate, so they could not read the written brochures and other materials used for communication.

However, some NGOs usually craft strategic communication systems and choose rightful language before they reach out their target audience so as to enhance delivery of information. As observed by Kuria, J., (2015), FCI majorly used Kikuyu and Swahili languages, 76% and 24% respectively, to train on AIVs in the *barazas* and demonstrations held in Lari Sub County. There was no *baraza* or demonstration that was conducted in English or other language.

Haneef, M., & Shaheen, A., (2014), shares similar findings as the majority of NGOs respondents said that they collected the information related to a particular community before developing the communication strategy for community mobilization. Usually data related to language, living style, habits of the people, cultural aspects, norms and values, traditions, customs and trends of the people were collected before going into the community for mobilization. This data helped the NGOs to develop communication strategies according to the needs of the community.

However, Hue Trong Duong, (2017), observes that there has not been much scholarly work on the communication aspect of NGOs, especially with regard to their strategic communications.

ROLES OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG THE AGRICULTURAL NGOS

Social media have ensured quick delivery and response to information between the receiver and sender. An effective way of ensuring successful delivery and sustainability of a viable agricultural extension subsector. Mukhtar et al. (2015), maintains that social media has fostered a fast platform for information dissemination and interactive contact; rivalled by none in this time.

According to Kuria, W., (2014), users of social media have access to platforms like Mkulima Young, Young Farmers Market, Digital Farmers Kenya and Mkulima Hub Kenya. Farmers and those interested in farming obtain information from these social media platforms.

The researcher, Kuria, W., (2014) adds, social media has revolutionized communication whereby it has managed to surpass traditional gatekeepers in the traditional media; that is editors and other decision makers who set the agenda. Nevertheless, social media has not overthrown traditional media, but is complementing it in agenda setting.

In essence, social media has changed the way we communicate, read, search, think, talk, watch, listen, and sometimes start a revolution – be it political and or social. Social media is more about sociology and psychology of communication than about technology (Saravanan & Suchiradipita, 2014).

IV. REASONS BEHIND THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Afrad & Barau (2017), contends that the degree of social media penetration is obviously growing faster than imagined,

coupled with the level of technology advancements that continue to bring world at everyone's finger tips and make information accessible without having to go through hiccups of travelling and delays.

Kuria, W., (2014), asserts that social media platforms educate and inform on agricultural matters as well as facilitating the buying and selling of agricultural produce and related products. The users exchange information and discuss issues concerning agriculture based on experience and knowledge. They also buy and sell agricultural produce and inputs and use pictures, links and videos to facilitate this. This sharing of information facilitates the marketing of the farmers produce and formation of networks. The social media platforms are also used to share links, news articles, information, feedback and for queries.

V. CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED IN THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG THE NGOS

Social media have various challenges due to their high level of unregulated nature. For example, the information could be false sometimes. Harley (2013) reported that large unregulated system of social media platforms can account for blowout of both false information and rumours. It can also detach a farmer, extension worker or any other professional in the line, rather than facilitate salient physical interactions which are indispensable for proper networking and ultimate development.

According to Afrad & Barau (2017), many challenges are currently faced in using social media for agricultural extension service delivery; viz. illiteracy, shortage of infrastructure, limited participation, non-institutionalization, lack of quality control, lack of adequate yardstick for measuring impact and need for gender sensitive approach.

Kuria, W., (2014) adds the most common challenges faced by farmers include poor network access, power outages, and costly charges when accessing the internet.

Andres & Woodard (2013) observes that large number of farmers are subsistent with little to incur data cost for accessing social media. These farmers are commonly found in Africa and Asia (mostly developing countries). In addition, there's high internet cost at internet café. These ultimately present challenge to social media use in agricultural extension service. Also, high internet cost restricts the use of multimedia like images and videos as they consume much more data than text.

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