Use of New Media during the Kenya Elections

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Christa Odinga
19850502-2981
“Torturing bodies is less effective than shaping minds.”
(Castells 2007a, 238)
Abstract

This master’s thesis contributes to the development of Manuel Castells theory of power and counter-power. The theoretical framework also consists of current research within the area of new media in the promotion of democratic action. The thesis looks into the emergence and development of new media during the 2007/2008 post-election violence and the progression made within the social media realm in terms of information dissemination and monitoring of speech online during the 2013 election through the use of social media together with open source software for information collection and dissemination.

The aim of this thesis is to illustrate, using the Kenyan case, the power of the masses and how this power can be exercised for both good and evil. The thesis looks into the role of social media during the post-election violence in 2007/2008 and the elections of 2013. The main source of information is through primary and secondary data. Particular emphasis is given to tools of social media and the manner in which interaction took place in these platforms. Analysis is conducted on the amalgamation of citizen journalism and how this offered an alternative medium for communication for citizens.

The thesis concludes that there is indeed power in mass communication online to drive mass action. New media increased political participation and dialogue in the Kenyan case that was not present before and in turn empowered Kenyans to take part in political processes but it cannot be said that it increased the level of democratization.

*Key words:* New media, Democratization, Power and Counter-power, Hate-speech, Kenya
# Table of contents

1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1  
1.1 Purpose ..................................................................................................................... 1  
1.2 Methodology and Material ....................................................................................... 2  
1.3 Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................ 4  
1.3.1 The context of Castell’s theory ........................................................................... 5  
1.4 Disposition ............................................................................................................... 6  

2 Kenya: Media and Violence .......................................................................................... 7  
2.1 The evolution of the Kenyan media .......................................................................... 8  
2.2 Media and Politics – the odd bed fellows ................................................................. 9  
2.3 The Emergence of the Citizen Journalist ................................................................. 11  

3 Power and Counter-power in the Media .................................................................... 16  
3.1 The Amalgamation of New Media and Citizen Journalism ..................................... 16  

4 Analysis of the Role of New Media Versus Main Stream Media ............................... 28  
4.1 Theorizing Speech, power and counter power ....................................................... 28  
4.2 Hate-Speech and Politics ......................................................................................... 30  
4.3 The Power of Mass Self- Communication ................................................................ 37  

5 Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 40  

6 References ................................................................................................................... 43
1 Introduction

In the developing world, specifically Sub-Saharan Africa, mainstream media has been misused by those in power to oppress or keep citizens in a situation of absolute submission so as to maintain power. Sub-Saharan Africa media stations, until recently, have been predominantly owned by the state and therefore news has often been skewed in favor of the leaders. Government controlled media has been known to be notorious for hailing brutal leaders and not publishing anything that would put them in bad light.

Africa has steadily moved over the years from dictatorship to democratic rule and in turn this has led to a significant change from a media scene controlled by political actors to a more liberalized media scene. Africa, and Kenya specifically, being dependent on media politics, lives up to Castells notion of ‘what does not exist in the media, does not exist in the public mind’ (Castells 2007b, 241). Mainstream media has been seen, still is, to play a significant role in political processes and dissemination of information of which previously excluded the local citizen from participation.

The emergence of new media has led to new forms of political participation. The Internet has been embraced in Kenya both as a tool for communication and most importantly political participation thus paving way to citizen participation (Oser, Hooghe, and Marien 2013). Kenya’s internet users have risen steadily with the latest figures showing a total of 17.38 million users at the beginning of 2013 in comparison to the less than 10 million users in 2011 with mobile phones being one of the main means of internet access (Hook 2013).

The changing Kenyan media and political landscape motivated the topic of this thesis. Less focus has been placed on the role of social media in political processes in Sub-Saharan Africa and with this thesis I hope to shed light on how new media tools are used in Kenya to show a progressive country that has embraced technology and the manner in which these tools are used.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the development of Castells theory of power and counter-power in the role of new media in democratic processes. I have therefore studied and analyzed the role of new media, these being social network sites and open source software, during the Kenya 2007/2008 post-election violence period and the 2013 elections. The motivation behind studying Kenya is to better understand the role of new media in a developing nation. While this study may not be representative of how social media is used universally in...
democratic processes, it however provides an insight on perhaps what can be regarded as the shortcomings of new media as well as its capabilities in influencing the role of the populous in generating counter argument and in providing fairness and accuracy in reporting.

Therefor my main research question for this thesis is: How does the use of social media during the Kenyan 2007 post-election violence and the 2013 general elections contribute to the development of Castells theory of power and counter-power?

1.2 Methodology and Material

This thesis is a single country study involving two cases, the 2007 post-election violence and the 2013 general election. The country and the cases were selected on a most likely basis, i.e., meaning that I determined that the assumptions predicted in the theory tested were assumed to be most likely to occur in the country and cases selected. As a single country study involving few cases this study will not definitively prove or disprove the theory tested, but it will provide important research to further the theoretical development and produce knowledge relevant for policy making (Landman 2003, 34f; Guba and Lincoln 2000, 270ff).

Robert Yin (2003) writes that case studies are:

"[G]eneralizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study […] does not represent a 'sample', and in doing a case study, your goal will be to generalize theories (analytical generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)"


In order to answer the question I have posed I have adapted a qualitative approach to the topic in line with the argument presented by Yin (2003) above. The qualitative content analysis is a very common approach which "comprises a searching-out of underlying themes in the materials being analyzed" (Bryman 2004, 392). Bryman (2004) further states that qualitative content analysis is:

"An approach to documents that emphasizes the role of the investigator in the construction of the meaning of and in texts. There is an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of data and on recognizing the significance for understanding the meaning of the context in which an item being analyzed (and the categories derived from it) appeared" (Bryman 2004, 542; cf. Kohlbacher 2006, 9).

Yet this explanation only lays the foundation for the qualitative approach, an approach more concerned with themes and idiomatic descriptions than specific hypothesis which can be tested and measured against an assumed reality. The approach I have adopted is best described by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) as:
"[…] a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 4; cf. Kohlbacher 2006, 10).

In order to study the socialized communication, at the core of Manuel Castells (2007) theory of power and counter-power, I have attempted to study various forms of first-hand material (cf. Castells 2007a, 239). However, to better direct my study I first conducted a more traditional form of cumulative research by studying the topic at hand utilizing various forms of second-hand material such as journal articles, scholarly books and newspaper articles. The information gained here was then used to sieve through the information on social media platforms as well as quantitative data aggregated from various social media platforms.

The challenge has not been to find data, especially socialized communication, but rather to interpret it and to place it into context in order to make sense of it. The role of the investigator, as highlighted above by Bryman (2004), has been crucial and source criticism has been an important tool to prevent myth to blend with reality and the legends with the facts both in relation to the first and the secondary material (cf. Herodotus in Kapuściński 2007, 261f).

The authors of the secondary material used in this thesis are mainly scholars specialized in writing about the African continent. This has been the main motivation behind the selection of their material as they understand the political environment of the continent and have conducted extensive research in the area.

The data used is mostly from social networks such as Twitter, Facebook and various blogs which I identified as the platforms in which political activism and conversations mainly took place during the two election periods studies. The quantitative data available was mainly collected over a 30 day period during the last two weeks of February and the first two weeks of March 2013 allowing me to assess the trends before and after the general election. The collection was done using hashtag.org and cloud.li allowing me to study what was said, how it was said, and in relation to what it was said by following how hashtags keywords were used and connected to each other. The two services also allowed me to quantify the reach of various users allowing me to assess the relative weight of the various users. Cloud.li is a real-time twitter visualization tool which returns keywords and hashtags related to any topic while hashtags.org provide real-time trend charts, lists of prolific users for hashtags, related hashtags as well as a current context of the searched hashtag. Ushahidi.com, which means "testimony" in Swahili, was first launched to allow users to submit data on violence in the aftermath of the 2007 Kenyan elections. Today the Ushahidi.com is global allowing citizen
journalism to track and monitor political violence etc. While I have not used their source material I have access and studied their excellent work monitoring to the social media during the 2013 Kenyan elections under the Umati “crowd” brand name. This information, as other, has been weighed and analyzed with care.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Castells, in his work titled Communication Power: Media and Society (2009), describes Power as the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favor the empowered actor’s will, interests and values (Castells 2009). Castells argues that the process of power making must be seen from two perspectives: one on one hand these being processes that can enforce existing domination or seize structural positions of domination, and on the other hand as the countervailing processes that resist established domination on behalf of the interests or values that are excluded or under-represented in the compositions of the network. This is something Castells describes as Power and Counter-power, where the latter follows the concept of active audiences who attempt to resist the power being exercised upon them (Castells 2007, 241f).

This struggle between the Power and the Counter-power Castells (2007) argues takes place in the media, constituting a space for the power struggle (Castells 2007, 242), a struggle that can be likened to a war:

“If credibility, trust, and character become critical issues in deciding the political outcome, the destruction of credibility and character assassination become the most potent political weapons. Because all parties resort to it, all parties need to stockpile ammunition in this battle.” (Castells 2007, 243).

In this war over the domination of perception the rise of horizontal communication, produced by the mass audiences, has become an efficient means of leveraging counter-power by means of web 2.0 applications involving various forms of social media.

”[S]ocial movements may be progressive or reactionary or just alternative without adjectives. But in all cases they are purposive collective actions aimed at changing the values and interests institutionalized in society, what is tantamount to modify the power relations.” (Castells 2007, 249).

Castells defines counter-power as the capacity of a social actor to challenge and eventually change the power relations institutionalized in society. Social change happens when the counter-power, shaped by social actors who do not feel well represented by the system, succeeds in challenging the norms and rules of society’s institutions. Castells identifies a number of instances where counter-power has been used for the public good when social movements mobilize using
mass self-communication to challenge the networks of instrumentality (Castells 2007, 249f).

In 2007 politicians and power brokers used mass media and traditional face to face communication to promote and coerce various Kenyan tribes to fight each other over old grievances, often for no other reason than the political aspirations of the instigators (International Crisis Group 2008, 9ff). The question ahead of the 2013 General Elections in Kenya was if indeed the Kenyan people would be able to escape their history by mobilizing against the networks of instrumentality without “virtualizing themselves to death” and ultimately build “meaning in the new space/time of [their] existence, made of both flows, places and their interaction” in order to win the struggle for the control of their own minds and challenge the instrumentality of a system having used and abused the population for far too long (Castells 2007, 250).

In this text I intend to use this central theory of power and counter-power as a means of looking into the balance and role of citizen journalism and mainstream media versus social/new media in new democracies in further the theoretical discussion as well as to highlight and understand the case itself. Doing this Manuel Castells’ (2011) argument on power will be central; Castells argue (beyond what we have already discovered) that power is the relational capacity by which people or institutions can impose their will on others and since networks are based on relations power resides in the network (Castells and Monge 2011, 790).

1.3.1 The context of Castell’s theory

Beck talks about the change of power from what he refers to as the ‘old game’ of which goes by many names such as ‘nation-state’, ‘national industrial state’, ‘national capitalism’ or even ‘national welfare state’ whereby politics was tied to state actors and institutions (Beck 2005, 4). Knowing this it is reasonable to assume that globalization has brought forth a new space and a new framework for acting whereby there are more players and the rules constantly change. With these changes, the old players have had to acclimatize and invent means of being incorporated into the game together with the new actors.

Beck further compares the old and new game to chess and droughts whereby with draughts, the aim would be to get rid of all opponents pieces (Beck 2005, 4), which was the case during the period in which the Kenyan media was controlled by the state therefore all broadcasts would be in favor of the government. Beck states that “if the new game was chess, the aim would be to place the king in checkmate” (Beck 2005, 4). The traditional understandings of power, violence and authority changed in the Kenyan media landscape. Where traditionally the state, or political leaders, have called for the ‘silencing’ of protestors or opponents, in 2007 and 2013 the state lost its power to silence the masses due to the inability to control social media. As Beck says in power and counter-power; whilst the power of the state would traditionally grow through territorial
conquests, the power of the citizens (Kenyans) grew precisely to the extent that they became extraterritorial factors (Beck 2008, 796).

The most recent political and social movements have been attributed to social media, looking at the infamous Arab spring and Occupy Wallstreet. Therefore supporting Castells argument that social change results from the interaction between cultural change and political change (Castells 2009, 300). These events were proof that communication networks can fuel and provide accelerators for social movements. Social media as a tool for mass action leaves no government or institution insusceptible to social and political movements.

1.4 Disposition

The thesis is written using a traditional structure where I first introduce my subject, aim and purpose.

In chapter 2 a short political history of Kenya is provided to give a contextual background of into the reason behind ethnic divisions that resulted into the 2007/2008 post-election violence and the 2013 hate-speech occurrence in the social media.

In chapter 3 talks about the media history in Kenya giving a background of it’s evolution to date. The chapter also looks into the formation of citizen journalism and the support of its formation through social media.

Chapter 4 brings forth the power and counter-power events that have occurred in the media and social media both during the post-election violence and the 2013 elections.

Chapter 5 provides the role of new media in the enforcement of power and counter-power as a platform for the citizens. This chapter also brings forth hate-speech in new media and how power and counter – power took place in the context.
2 Kenya: Media and Violence

In order to analyze the post election violence in 2007 it is important to understand Kenya’s diverse ethnic or tribal set up as well as its history from colonization through to the current modern times. There are 42 ethnic groups in Kenya with the Kikuyu being the largest making up for 17 percent of the population. The next biggest tribes are the Luhya with 14 percent, the Kalenjin at 13 percent and the Luo with 10 percent. Out of these main tribes the Luo, the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin have been the main participants in politics. Out of these tribes Post-independence Kenyans had to forge one Nation after 68 years of anti-colonial struggle (McGregor 2013; Ochieng 1989, 202ff).

Tribal tensions were heightened during the colonial era. The assumption among white settlers where long that Kenya would remain a white man’s country for-ever. This notion and idea was under blown by what was referred to as the divide-and-rule policies adopted by British colonialists to create distrust among the ethnic groups and undermine opposition. At independence in 1963 Kenya’s first president Jomo Kenyatta (from the Kikuyu tribe) and his Vice President Jaramogi Oginga Odinga (from the Luo tribe) adopted what has been referred to as an ‘ethnically-driven-politics’ to defeat a party of small tribes. However, because of mistrust and grievances Kenyatta and Odinga fell out which would come to deepen the divisions between the Kikuyu and Luo communities (McGregor 2013; International Crisis Group 2013, 4ff; Ochieng 1989, 202ff).

Another divisive issue in Kenya is that of land ownership in Kenya’s Rift Valley which aggregates tensions between ethnic groups in the area. Before the colonial era the Kalenjin and the Masai inhabited this area. However, at the onset of colonialism the British colonialists forced pastoral groups off the land in order to be able to develop the land agriculturally. The colonialists further forced or lured thousands of Kenyans from various tribes to the Rift Valley in need cheap labour. This caused the traditional of the valley to be gradually displaced from their traditional homesteads while uprooting century old tribal conflicts by redrawing borders which had taken generation to settle. Today this change of landownership in the Rift Valley is a key factor in much of the ethnic violence seen through most of Kenya’s modern history (Nowrojee and Manby 1993, 16–17; International Crisis Group 2013, 4ff).

Jomo Kenyatta, the founding father of modern Kenya and a detainee of the colonial administration capitalized on the colonial legacy of political detention, torture and murder to win political power but then carried on this legacy himself. Rumors abound has claimed that Kenyatta was behind the assassination of many political opponents including the Luo political front figure Tom Mboya. These rumors, true or not, has further added cause to injury and deepened the ethnic divide (Hawke 2013; Ochieng 1989, 203ff).
The culture of authoritarianism further evolved under the second president of Kenya, President Daniel arap Moi. Moi came from the Kalenjin community and used his presidency as an opportunity to further the wealth and power of himself and his tribe. Given the tribal nature of Kenyan politics, these actions were to some extent need for Moi to secure his political base. However he also has to manage the ambitions of the Kikuyu elites since an obvious attempt to consolidate power away from the largest tribal group would have threatened his hold on power. The Moi Presidency developed into a de-facto single party state and it was not until 1991 that the one-party clause of the was removedto enabling multiparty politics again. The Moi government, however, continued to resist leveling the playing field for other parties and it wasn’t until 1998 that Kenya seriously began to open up (Hawke 2013; Ochieng 1989, 203ff).

Some authors such as Daniel Branch (2009), in his work Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya, argues that after independence Kenya became ‘as much as a post-conflict society as a post-colonial state’ and that this would also be the roots of the post-independence political struggle (Hawke 2013). Hence Kenya remains a post-conflict society not only because effects of the independence struggle are still experienced and felt, but also all the years of misrule also created new agonies. The history of violent conflict is to a large extent a history of economic and social injustice. These injustices still exist today and continue to fuel tribal struggles for the power and resources of the mighty but also the grievances and weight of history of the poor (Hawke 2013).

2.1 The evolution of the Kenyan media

Kenya has two official languages, English and Swahili, but a large percentage of the people in the country rarely speak either. Many do not have more than a basic understanding of Swahili and English. For a majority of people in the country, these are secondary languages used as a lingua franca, but not a preferred language of communication. For most, the preferred language is that of their community. More than one hundred unofficial languages and dialects are spoken (Ismail and Deane 2008, 321f).

A substantial proportion of the population of Kenya—typically the poorest, the most politically marginalized, those who feel the most aggrieved and excluded from Kenya’s economic success—have for most of the country’s history had access only to a media controlled by a government they distrust. This is no longer the case (Ismail and Deane 2008, 321).

In 2000 the formation of the first vernacular station took place, Kameme FM, a Kikuyu language station. This broke the state monopoly on local language broadcasting. In 2004, a new law further liberalized the media and opened the way for a wave of new local language radio stations targeting listeners from the main ethnic communities: Kikuyus in Central Province, Luos in West, Kalenjins in Northwest, Kambas in Southeast, and Kisiis in Southeast. Commercial
incentives, rather than development or political ones, drove the opening of these stations (Ismail and Deane 2008, 322).

2.2 Media and Politics – the odd bed fellows

With the slight evolution of the Kenyan media since independence, political debates were a distance dream under the de facto or the de jure one party rule under the former Presidents Kenyatta and Moi. Even though the media in Kenya has had it better and have been less repressed than majority of other African countries, it was only until the end of the Moi regime in 2002 that it became open to criticizing the government. The Kenyan media scene has witnessed a level of mediatization and the media still remained the main source of information on political, economic and social matters in the country (Somerville 2011; Schulz 2004).

It was only until after the formal legalization of multiparty politics that the press became a forum for lively political debates. These debates frequently took place in hostile environments for the journalists and were often unstructured and unfocused. Greater freedom of expression led to liberalization of the electronic media sector (Lafargue et al. 2008, 61).

From 2002, the Kenyan media started to register an unmatched economic growth seeing the number of media stakeholders grow emphasizing the role in the democratization process which begun in 1991 (Lafargue et al. 2008, 61). In 2007, the emergence of three other additional dailies was seen increasing the total number to eight re-affirming the new dynamism in the market (Somerville 2011).

With the development of the Kenyan media scene agree it is possible to agree with Benedict Anderson (cited in Hadland 2010, 120) in that the formation of what he terms as ‘imagined communities’ each with its members, needs and agendas was developed. This is especially true for the function of vernacular stations. As part of the formation of the ‘imagined communities’ adoption of new technologies for different functions was witnessed (Hadland 2010, 120). The use of new technology to coordinate action: SMS campaigns to promote violence, blogs to challenge mainstream media narratives, and online campaigns to promote awareness of human rights violations (Goldstein and Rotich 2007).

With the local media stations and print media being either owned by individuals or the government, we witness what Castells describes as a networked power, which is distinct from network power and networking power which he describes as the form of power exercised by certain nodes over other nodes within the network (Castells 2011, 773ff). In these communications network nodes agenda setting, managerial and editorial decision making power in the organizations rests often in individuals that own and operate multimedia communication networks. The network – making power is in this case referring to the owners and controllers of the media corporations (Castells 2011, 773ff).

This could either be the state, owning the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, or businesses or individuals. These owners and controllers, have the financial, legal,
institutional, and technological means to organize and operate mass communication networks. Often, they decide the content and format of communication according to the formula that will best accomplish the goals they assign to the network. These could be profit making, power making, cultural making or all of the above. In history, the media industry has witnessed quite a few of these individuals and in a global context we can refer to Murdoch, Bloomberg, Berlusconi and in the internet world we can talk of Mark Zuckerberg, Jerry Yang and a few others (Castells 2011, 781).

Just as it is globally, in Kenya, the network power was and still is in the hands of a small number of conglomerates, or individuals, and their surrogates and partners and these individuals are intertwined with financial investors of various origins (cf. Castells 2011, 781f).

During the elections, the role of the Kenyan media was not limited to covering the election campaign and informing the citizen: certain groups or editorials clearly took sides with candidates in the race; some media were directly created by parties they supported; journalists even contested for seats in the elections. In Kenya, the media became a political player in every sense of the word (cf. Lafargue et al. 2008, 70)

The growth in the media significantly promoted the electronic media sector. Between 2003 and 2007, the radio sector witnessed a rapid growth with fifty new mostly privately owned radio stations. The television sector also saw the arrival of new players. This growth in the electronic media sector added a new dimension to the 2007 general elections. Kenyans suddenly had a variety of news sources and advertising, which had initially been confined to print media, was redirected to radio and to a lesser extent television (Lafargue et al. 2008, 67ff).

The two main media houses, the Nation media Group and the Standard Group have lively internet sites for their dailies – www.nationmedia.com and www.eastandard.net, with subsections specifically set up for the elections. The Nation Media Group’s ‘Kenya Elections 2007’ combined articles on elections campaign as published by their newspaper ‘The Daily Nation’, their journalists’ weblogs and NTV video reporting which was aired in partnership with their YouTube site. These videos were essentially a collection of reports on meetings, party conferences and the satirical political program Bulls Eye. This media site was especially useful and popular to the Kenyan diaspora in keeping in touch with the elections and political progress. The Standard Group also followed suit in launching a platform on the internet to cover the elections (Lafargue et al. 2008, 67ff).

Leading Kenyan newspaper, The Daily Nation, developed a social media sentiment tracker on their elections website indicating importance of the social media arena for political debate and campaign (Orring 2013). In addition to this, just as international broadcasters such as Al Jazeera, France 24 and CNN, NTV started and maintained their own YouTube channel to tap into the diaspora audience.

With all these developments, a new trend that made the media and politics strange bed partners emerged. An evidence of the relationship between the media
and politics was the characterization by a number of journalists seeking parliamentary civic seats mostly on small party tickets (Lafargue et al. 2008, 70f).

These journalists or media owners are what Castells refered to as the ‘switchers’. These are the holders of positions or controllers of connecting points between various strategic networks aimed at diffusing specific political ideological discourses (cf. Castells 2009, 46). The political ambition by journalists indicated that their work could be seen as a springboard to political careers and they therefore took advantage of not only their technological know-how and political activists’ ability to communicate but also of their popularity amongst the masses. In the end, numerous media were partial. Journalists suddenly reported in a manner that would place them in favor of the constituencies and constituents that they had political interest in.

In this process the corporations were witnessed to invest in expanding communications networks, more people also built their own networks of mass self-communications through the comment sections and the expansion of the Kenyan blogosphere, thus empowering themselves. Therefore, just as Castells argues, the network making power in the communications realms was characterized by the action of multimedia corporate networks, including business and government that interact with network users who both consume media products and create their own culture (cf. Castells 2011, 783). The growth of the electronic media added a new dimension to the 2007 general elections. The reader, the listener and the television viewer had a wide range of sources of information in English, Kiswahili and other local languages to choose from (Lafargue et al. 2008, 63).

2.3 The Emergence of the Citizen Journalist

With these developments that encouraged audience participation, we see the increase of citizen journalism. Citizen journalism is a term that has came into use, more so in Africa, since the mid-2000s. The boundaries of citizen journalism are not yet clearly drawn but the term is frequently used to represent non-professional, amateur publications of news items. Therefore citizen journalism plays an important role in crisis reporting. It has been argued that citizen journalism is a phenomenon of the emergence of a networked public sphere based on digitally networked technologies such as the internet and mobile phones (cf. Mutsvairo and Columbus 2012, 122).

Benkler (2006) (cited in Mutsvairo and Columbus 2012) mentions that in the networked public sphere, common based peer production of which citizen journalism is a form is enabled by two shifts in communication technology. In essence citizen journalism happens when amateur or untrained journalist engages in journalistic practice, a mission that often involves sourcing, interviewing, witnessing, writing and reporting news. In the Kenyan case, the post election conflict offered fertile ground for citizen journalism. (Mutsvairo and Columbus 2012, 122)
Many claims are made about the democratizing power of new media. Social media is considered to contribute to government accountability, human rights activism, the development of civil society and practices of citizenship. In terms of accountability and transparency, it is increasingly difficult for governments to hide or manipulate information or to act inconsistently with citizen concerns. The use of mobile phones and the Internet, for example, allow for news of any inappropriate government actions to quickly reach the public and to be challenged (Haider 2011, 3). It also allows for people to follow decision-making processes and discuss issues of common concern.

With the new multiparty system under formation, a new twist took place in the media world. What had mostly been owned by the government was now under the control of politicians and leading business moguls. In Bourdieu’s critique of Habermas, he mentions that the public sphere operates not as a rational, democratic space but serves to undermine and silence certain classes of opinion (Hadland 2010, 121). Just as in Kenya, with business moguls owning the main media outlets, the public sphere became a theatre for elites in which mass viewpoints, collectively or individually, were quashed.

Other scholars too have described the distortions to the functioning of the public sphere generated by class and gender interests. During this period, Kenya witnessed new power relationships at work, with new forms and new kinds of actors. The news outlets were and still are witnessed to favor or back the incumbent governments or the opposition leaders (Somerville 2011).

Daudi Were, the blogger behind Mental Acrobatics and cofounder of the Kenyan Blogs we bring, went to the streets with his camera and documented the confrontations between police and demonstrators. Were writes:

*On Thursday (January the 3rd) I headed into town to get a feel of the mood on the ground before the ODM rally, banned by the government but which ODM insisted it would go ahead with anyway, at Uhuru Park was due to start. I took a matatu into town, jumped out at Railways and started walking towards the centre of town. I noticed all the newspapers had the same headline, Save our Beloved Country. The local media has been criticized in some quarters for not utilizing its unique position to help the efforts against the violence, clearly the editors had decided to get proactive. (“ODM Rally” 2008) (Were cited in Mäkinen and Kuira 2008, 331).*

As what may be termed as citizen journalism during the Kenyan elections, some bloggers helped expose sham processes resulting in cancellation of some results. Robert Alai, a techie blogger and ‘voice of the voiceless’, as his twitter profile @RobertAlai proclaims, was angered by attempts to favor contestants for various posts based on nepotism and favoritism in the Nyanza region. A loser for the Siaya Governor seat, Oburu Odinga, the brother of Kenya’s Prime Minister Raila Odinga, blamed him for his predicament (Khamadi 2013).

Citizen journalism can therefore be defined as a rapidly evolving form of journalism where common citizens, such as Robert Alai and Daudi Were, take the
initiative to report news or express views about happenings within their community. It is news of the people, by the people and for the people.

Citizen journalists are independent, freelancing citizen reporters. They are not constrained by conventional journalistic processes or methodologies, and they usually function without editorial oversight. Citizen journalists gather, process, research, report, analyse and publish news and information, most often utilising a variety of technologies made possible by the internet (Banda 2010, 26).

The rise of citizen journalism has come about due to mistrust of journalists and media stations that have often been witnessed to be biased or skewed favoring a certain political figure or party. This is especially true of Kenya where broadcasting houses such as the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, obviously in favor of the sitting government. Participatory journalism has also been sustained by the constant emergence of new technologies such as smart phones which enable individuals to take pictures, videos and record (Banda 2010, 26).

A case that perfectly shows the importance of citizen journalism was especially during the 2007/2008 crisis. Although there were newscasts, the information was not timely. Coupled with the live broadcast ban, many were not able to keep up with events. With blogs, there was a free flow of information, with some bloggers scooping the mainstream Kenyan media. An example of bloggers leading news coverage was Joseph Karoki’s blog, which on January 2 posted news about Ugandan forces entering Kenya’s western province of Nyanza. Local press did not publish this story until January 7 (Goldstein and Rotich 2007, 8). This suggests blogs had begun to fill the gap in coverage created by local media that were not reporting violence or deaths due to government pressure.

During the post-election violence, Kenyans were seen to get involved in the public sphere as ‘citizen-journalists’. Those who were dissatisfied with self-censorship of the mainstream media during the crisis became reporters and digital activists. They used blogs to challenge the standard narrative, which resulted in the broadening of views (Haider 2011, 3).

Citizen journalism is however not to be confused with traditional journalism which has often been termed as ‘undemocratic’. Traditional journalism is structured around sources of news. These sources of news tend to be ‘official’ sources, ensconced in their positions of power. In Africa, and possibly in most countries in the world, the most powerful sources of news tend to be politicians and businesspeople. These are what can be considered elite sources of information. Even though these sources may legitimately claim to ‘represent’ the people, most ordinary people would disagree that they are being represented. A factor that is typical about such sources is that they have the resources – in most cases – to access the institutions of mass communication (Banda 2010, 27).

According to Banda (2010), there are two types of citizen journalism: non-institutional and institutional. Non-institutional forms of citizen journalism are extra-institutional, placing the individual at the core of the practice. This appears to be the notion of citizen journalism that readily lends itself to different forms of social networking, where private citizens use a combination of platforms to generate content and disseminate it as widely as possible. Non-institutional citizen journalism thus means the type of citizen journalism which revolves around the
individual as such. It seeks no recourse to any organizational framework of constraints. The non-institutional citizen journalist enjoys unlimited freedom especially since they do not answer to any authority thus being highly individuated and thus self-regulated (Banda 2010, 29). This however poses a question of to what extent can the citizen exercise moral or ethical restraint?

Sometimes, citizen journalists find themselves being members of online communities, such as discussion forums such as Ushahidi, Umati or Uchaguzi. Institutional citizen journalism, on the other hand, refers to that type of citizen journalism which has a form of organizational structure or constraining ability, complete with external constraints, however minimal. The individual is still an important aspect of the practice, drawing them into a dialogic communication with the many or few recipients of their content. This is evident today in media institutions where you witness the move into space created by non-institutional citizen journalists (Banda 2010, 29).

During the onset of the elections, the media was seen to perform double duties of keeping the public informed on the political events as they ensued as well as condemning wrongs by the political elite. Factual reporting was seen to take center stage during political rallies and meetings and on the other hand the print media presented a platform for debate where political activists and civil society engaged each other in discussing key issues in the political agenda. Kenyans were able to participate through the comment sections online providing their sentiments and views in relation to articles published and these were read by Media houses that owned both print and radio services (Lafargue et al. 2008, 57).

The subsequent engagement of the media houses with the internet making a platform for debates and expression of opinions resulted into the increase of Kenyan blogs. New media was also seen to be used for ulterior motives. Towards the end of 2007, mailboxes of Kenyans were filled with spam and black mails from political activists spreading rumors of political uncertainties and ethnic attacks. In addition to this, SMS was used as a technique of misinformation discrediting opponents. The ‘Black SMS’ or ‘Black propaganda SMS’ circulating through mobile phones, became the subject of numerous articles in the press (Lafargue et al. 2008, 69).

During this SMS period, counter-power came into play when the media chose to use SMS to interact with the public. The Nation Media Group launched a service to send information in real time via SMS. Other tabloids Daily Metro and Nairobi Star followed suit with their special columns (SMSChat) which allowed readers to express themselves (Lafargue et al. 2008, 69). Some electronic media talk shows encouraged the public to give their views about topics of discussion via their mobile phone.

During the election coverage, President Kibaki, seemed to receive more media coverage than his opponents by virtue of being the sitting president (Lafargue et al. 2008, 57). During the 2007/8 elections, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, the currently owned state media, was heavily criticized by the European Union election monitors for failing to fulfill what was termed as ‘it’s minimal legal obligation as a public service broadcaster…’ in its coverage demonstrating a bias in favor of the ruling party (Somerville 2011).
During the 2007/8 elections, the press and broadcast media were witnessed to reflect freely on political debates but failed to prove equitable coverage of political leaders and parties. Even though there was extensive coverage of the campaign, there were clear preferences expressed for certain parties or candidates thus making the coverage impartial and just as Castell says, power relationships are the foundations of a society, as institutions and norms are constructed to fulfill the interests and values of those in power (cf. Castells 2011, 773).
3  Power and Counter-power in the Media

Kenya has experienced serious outbreaks of political motivated violence at each of the elections from 1992 and onwards. But the ferocity, rapid escalation and scale of the violence after the 2007 election took many Kenyans and international observers by surprise, shattering the idea of Kenya as a principally politically stable country. However, despite the reports, the 2013 elections proved to be one of the most peaceful in history.

Kenya’s democratization process, in comparison to the majority of Sub-Saharan countries, has been described as spectacular and rapid. Even during the Moi regime which was described as dictatorial, there was a level of tolerance and even encouragement in some cases of public expression (Lafargue et al. 2008, 43). However, pre-electoral violence, a recurring occurrence after the beginning of multipartyism, became a tool used by the government to stamp its dominance in the Kenyan society. Ethnic confrontations, land battles, livestock theft or banditry occurring in local frameworks had an agenda of terrorizing local populations that were suspected of supporting the opposition (Lafargue et al. 2008, 43).

Tim Jordan mentions that there are conditions that structure participation in cybertulture because only certain languages and certain cultural norms of communication are embedded in cyberspace’s technology (Jordan 2001, 2).

Cyber-pessimists have regarded digital media as a pandora’s box unleashing new inequalities of power and wealth, reinforcing deeper divisions between the information rich and poor, the tuned-in and the tuned-out, the activists and the disengaged. This account stresses that the global and social divides means that internet politics will disproportionally only benefit the elite (Norris 2001, 13).

3.1  The Amalgamation of New Media and Citizen Journalism

‘To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of civilization’ (Fanon in Jordan 2001, 6).

The diffusion of the internet, mobile communication, digital media and a variety of social software has prompted the development of horizontal networks of interactive communication. We can see the evolution from the communication of
the industrial society which was ideally centered on the mass media, characterized by the distribution of one way message from one to many, to the current communication foundation of the network society which is regarded to be the global web of horizontal communication (cf. Castells 2007a, 246).

The earliest forms of campaigns were characterized by face-to-face communication among party members and voters, and mass events and rallies organized by the party were dominant. In the ‘modern’ era of political campaigns, communication around the world and more likely the west was seen to have switched to the more impersonal channel of the mass media, especially TV. In the past decade, a third mode of election campaigning is said to have emerged. The new era of party campaigning, which has been initially referred to as Americanized style of campaigning has been seen to emerge in post industrial democracies (Römele 2003, 8). New ICTs has been seen to play a role in the Kenyan elections both on the side of campaigners and voters.

New media in the Kenyan context is not only seen as an extension or (partly) substitute of mainstream media and non-media activities; they also merge and mingle with one another. We see the new media increasingly, especially during the election period in Kenya, being and integral part in news gathering and dissemination and therefore the new media’s definition of reality amalgamates with the social definition of reality. This is a sign of how fragmented the media has evolved into today. With the internet, the number of possible sources of information increases and therefore the number of consumers is distributed across a large number of media outlets. This is seen to shape the patterns of consumption whereby new consumers are formulated or traditional consumers are moved from old to new media.

Another change within the media was witnessed during this period with the widespread public suspicion that the mainstream media could be bought or intimidated by government or political factions thus giving commercial broadcasters and vernacular stations greater credibility when they broadcasted accounts of events or statements by political leaders that contradicted the government and his supporters. All this led to a very unbalanced media environment after the elections. Even though trust was placed in local broadcasters who broadcasted in vernacular, it was obvious that the broadcasters also had their own political agendas. This is the second source of power that Castell talks about, when there’s the control of the connecting points between various strategic networks. These local broadcasters could therefore be described as switchers meaning they have the power to exert a geopolitical strategy. It was observed that despite the media society experiencing a process of social change in which according to Schultz defined as extension, substitution, amalgamation and accommodation still managed to extend the limits of communication (Schulz 2004). The broadcasting became extremely biased where nearly every channel identified with a political party or personality. A United Nations report said that ‘the coverage of the post-election violence brought to the fore the entrenched ethnic divisions as various media houses took obvious position for or against the status quo’ (Somerville 2011).
During the 2013 presidential elections in Kenya, new media played different roles for different parties. Some parties emphasized on the participatory aspects of the new technologies in communicating with voters and monitoring of public opinion, whilst others focused on the possibility of a top-down information dissemination. New media was identified as a means of people to communicate their thoughts as well as communicate with the political candidates. The internet, for the first time was used to perform a range of key functions such as opinion formation, interest mediation and party organization. During the elections, some parties or political candidates stressed downward dissemination of information via new media whilst others emphasized their interactive and targeting possibilities. The winning political coalition – Jubilee – led by the now sworn-in President Uhuru Kenyatta, was very active in their use of social media. Jubilee’s self-nomination as the “digital team” was not necessarily invented to reflect an active social media presence but rather their political manifesto to boost the Kenyan ICT sector, nevertheless the winning campaign team clearly invested heavily in social media. Kenyatta, in particular, was an active tweeter – not a big surprise as he was mentioned already in October last year as one of Africa’s top ten tweeting politicians by British newspaper The Guardian. And already his first day in the Presidential office he encouraged Kenyans to “stay connected” through newly established State House Kenya Twitter and Facebook accounts (Orring 2013).

During the onset of the 2007/2008 election violence, the government imposed a media black-out where all broadcasting stations were shut down both by the national and international community had no way of knowing what was happening in the country. During the media black-out, online networks proved to be the next best option to some Kenyans. This saw the creation of political blogs whereby bloggers wrote on what was going on wherever they were and asked readers to e-mail or post comments with details about incidences they witnessed. Eventually a mash-up was created showing where incidents occurred on a map. Following this development, a platform was created to serve as a centralized repository for on-the-ground reports from any Kenyan via SMS. This platform was what came to be known as ‘Ushahidi’ meaning ‘witness’ in Swahili. The Ushahidi platform was developed as a rapid prototype model that enabled individuals to submit reports via SMS or e-mail detailing acts of violence and trouble spots. A Kenyan could send an incident report with location details to a short code number (Cullum 2011). The text or e-mail could be rerouted through FrontlineSMS, a free software that turns a laptop and a mobile phone or modem into a central communications hub (Vila 2010). The functionalities and affordances of the program, made it a very efficient means of spreading information among the population about forthcoming actions and demonstrations. The program enabled users to send and receive text messages with large groups of people through mobile phones. It did not require an Internet connection, and worked with existing plans on all GSM phones, modems and networks, and synched with the Ushahidi platform. The message would then be received by an administrator who would verify the information with the original sender. If the report proved credible, it would be uploaded onto Google Maps in as close to real time as possible. This we see as evidence of the capability of digital networks
enabling social processes such as in this case information cascades whereby people are seen to make decisions sequentially, observe others’ decisions, draw rational inferences from these decisions and imitate them or share them on the basis of their inference (Cullum 2011).

The creation of the Ushahidi network structure, was seen as conducive to information which cascaded because users could easily observe what their connections did, make inferences and decisions on the basis of these observations which in turn were propagated further along the network (Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, and Wollebæk 2012). The citizen voices online may not have been as loud as those people matching in the streets, but the online communities expanded the democratic space and allowed people to share their opinions (Banda 2010, 44).

The use of Ushahidi was successful in drawing local and international attention on what was going on in Kenya as well as filling in the gap that was left by the silenced media stations (Cullum 2011). In this case we can see the powerful achievement of social media in having the capacity to link people within a digital network and in bridging the local and global enabling social processes where individual behaviors are aggregated to produce collective outcomes. Ushahidi may have been the most powerful crowd-sourcing tool born out of a crisis but the influence of social media and citizen journalists has grown in East Africa. In Kenya, rural constituents are interrogating local projects more than constituents in urban areas. Because social media forums such as blogs provide unmediated, ground-level views, citizen journalism has grown from the mere idea of lack of ‘editorialisation’ (Banda 2010, 44).

The most common cited benefit use of social media has been its ability to lower the costs of mobilization and participation. Information and communication technologies such as Ushahidi reduce costs associated with publishing and accessing information and facilitate communication and coordination across distances. This, in turn, reduces the transaction costs for organising collective action and the costs of participation. The Ushahidi platform significantly reduced the costs of participation in a human rights campaign with the sole requirement being a mobile phone signal (Haider 2011, 3).

The Ushahidi.com’s code, which is open source, has since been shared and in May 2008 it was shared with a group in South Africa that used it to map incidents of xenophobic violence. The deployment was considered rudimentary and made the founders realize the need to rebuild the framework from the ground up. Since then, Ushahidi.com has released several versions of the software, which has since been deployed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Kenya, Philippines, Pakistan and by major media houses – including Al jazeera and The Washington Post (Banda 2010, 46).

The 2013 elections saw the creation of Uchaguzi, A fancier version of its 2007 crisis-mapping online platform. It was created under the title of Uchaguzi, meaning “choice” in Kiswahili. On this new platform, citizens could report on security and tension as in 2007, but also now items directly related to the vote, including announcements of results, problems with staffing and polling station administration and logistics, as well as, comfortingly, any “positive events.” While in 2007 reports were primarily submitted through SMS, this year reports
could also be submitted through virtually any electronic means imaginable, including Twitter, email, and even a specially-designed Uchaguzi Android and iPhone app (Marchant 2013).

In a study conducted by Mäkinen & Kuira, social media generated an alternative public sphere, which widened the perspectives about the crisis and enabled new kinds of citizen participation in discussing the situation. The crisis also showed the significance of the social media as a horizontal form for information sharing. The social media offered narratives by citizen reporters and digital activists that were more diverse than the views presented in the mainstream media and represented grassroots reactions during the crisis. While the international media only scratched the surface of what was happening, and the traditional media partly resigned to censorship due to fears of repression, the social media offered swifter, more subjective, and more detailed coverage during a fast moving and changing situation. In turn, this resulted into the mainstream media relying on social media sites for information as they quickly gained confidence from the general public (Mäkinen and Kuira 2008, 330).

Online participation has become an important avenue of citizen participation therefore the arrival of affordable smart phones on the Kenyan market increased internet use on cell-phones and caused an explosion of social media (Jorgic 2013).

However even though a number of authors have expressed hope of increased citizen participation, others have been more skeptical about the internet’s democratic potential and in this case there was fear that Facebook and Twitter would take the place of text messages during the upcoming 2013 elections and be used to incite violence as it had happened in 2007/2008.

On the other end of the spectrum, mobile phones made hateful and violent messages easier and cheaper to transmit during the surge of violence. Kenyans started to receive frightening text messages that urged readers to express their frustrations with the election outcome by attacking other ethnic groups. One such message read:

“Fellow Kenyans, the Kikuyu’s have stolen our children’s future...we must deal with them in a way they understand...violence.” In reaction, another read: “No more innocent Kikuyu blood will be shed. We will slaughter them right here in the capital city. For justice, compile a list of Luo’s you know...we will give you numbers to text this information.”

Mass text messaging tools are identified to be remarkable useful for organizing explicit, systematic and publicly organized campaign of mob violence. The Humans Rights Watch for instance quoted a community organizer in Kalenjin saying:

“.....if there is any sign that Kibaki is winning, they war should break... They said the first step is to burn the Kikuyu homes in the village, then we will go to Turbo town, and after finishing Turbo they we organize to go to Eldoret...They were coaching the young people how to go on to war” (Goldstein and Rotich 2007, 4).
In Kenya, as in the rest of Africa, SMS is the most widely used digital application. The leading Kenyan online community, Mashada, during the elections period became overwhelmed with divisive and hostile messages. By the end of January 2008, the moderators decided to shut down the site, recognizing that civil discourse was rapidly becoming impossible. However, a few days later Mashada’s site administrator David Kobia launched ‘I Have No Tribe’, a site explicitly centered on constructive dialogue among Kenyans. The Mashada site was then redirected to the new site of which it rapidly filled with comments (Goldstein and Rotich 2007, 8).

This was a period that accelerated the development of the Kenya blogosphere and blogs were suddenly a critical source for Kenyans in Nairobi and the diaspora. Rumors that were spread via text message were dispelled via an online dialogue that took place on blogs and in the comments section of blogs. Kenyan bloggers became a critical part of the national conversation, starting during the three day ban on live broadcasts, when the web traffic from within Kenya shot through the roof. The influence ballooned further when radio broadcasters began to read influential bloggers over the airwaves, helping them reach not 5 percent, but 95 percent of the Kenya population. As press critic Jay Rosen writes, citizen journalists are:

“... the people formerly known as the audience who were on the receiving end of a media system that ran one way, in a broadcasting pattern, with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the population listened in isolation from one another—and who today are not in a situation like that at all... The people formerly known as the audience are simply the public made realer, less fictional, more able, less predictable” (Goldstein and Rotich 2007, 8).

Majority of Kenyans do not have internet access. However, the number of digital activists is growing as the middle-class population grows. The world of citizens’ media is familiar to the educated and wealthy population in the same way as in other societies. Thus one could argue that given its demographics, while the social media represent the elites’ views, the majority have limited possibilities for participating in Web-based discussions. Social media in Kenya has had a strong expatriate influence with pioneers such as Ethan Zuckerman (founder of Global Voices, an international network of bloggers and citizen journalists who follow and report what’s going on in the global blogosphere) and Eric Hersmann – founder of Ushahidi.

Many sites and weblogs are managed by Kenyans living overseas and by foreigners residing in the country. Until recently, most African Web content was designed to cater to the needs of foreigners, visitors, and investors and the elites (Mäkinen and Kuira 2008, 332). Even though the influence from contributions from outside Kenya is still notable, today social media and weblogs show more and increased local contribution.
There are various factors that may contribute to the success or weakness of social media and in turn the success of weakness of protests and movements that rely on them. These include: leadership, links to conventional media and other activists, elite reaction and external attention. Although new communication technologies tend to generate new forms of decentralised, non-hierarchical organisations and movements, effective organisation and leadership are still considered to be important to success (Haider 2011, 2).

For the first time social media offered an opportunity by allowing Kenyans to question candidates using short mobile phone messages, social media and crowd sourcing information and on the other hand social media affordances and network logic was leveraged by individual citizens wanting to encourage other citizens to take action resulting into the flourishing of hate speech (Abshir 2013).

The total number of Facebook users is 1, 886,560 with the largest user age group being between the ages of 25 – 34 making Kenya number 64 globally in the ranking of Facebook statistics by country and number seven in Africa (Socialbakers 2013). Twitter on the other hand has become a primary source of news in the country with Kenya ranking as the second most active in Africa after South Africa with about 2.5 million tweets. Most of the tweets have been identified to be generated by a Kenyan Twitter community calling itself ‘Kenyans on Twitter’ using the hashtag #KOT who proved the network can be a powerful tool for activism (Okutoyi 2013).

According to a study conducted on the development and presence of web 2.0 communication tools, the growth of Facebook users in Kenya is mainly taking place in urban or infrastructure rich part of the country as well as in rural or infrastructure poor areas. Nonetheless, access to the internet and latest ICT varies between rural and urban parts of the Kenya. SocialBaker’s Facebook page tracker shows some Kenyan presidential candidates are already using Facebook as part of their digital engagement strategy. Candidates Uhuru Kenyatta, Martha Karua and Peter Kenneth, for example, each boast more than 150,000 fans on their personal Facebook pages (Wyche, Schoenebeck, and Forte 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
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<th>PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>300,867</td>
<td>32,465</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Martha Karua</td>
<td>221,682</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Peter Kenneth</td>
<td>154,282</td>
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<td>William Samoei Ruto</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Raphael Tujo</td>
<td>23,348</td>
<td>1,792</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 1. (Kretchun 2013).
Despite having a large fan base, very few fans are involved in discussing Martha Karua. This stands in sharp contrast to the number of people discussing Peter Kenneth, who boasts the most engaged Facebook fan-base (Kretchun 2013).

The most onerous posts were identified to appear on Facebook, among an often unemployed and under-30 individuals, the same demographic that is assumed to have made up the 2007 post-election street fighters. One influential newspaper commentator in his article Headlined “The demented postings on social media must stop before blood flows.” wrote:

“Right now I feel let down, and very ashamed to be a Kenyan, for the level of post-election violence assaulting my eyes and ears every day is worse now than it was before and during the elections. This violence is not being fought on bloody streets; it is warfare waged on the pristine, modern, middle-class avenues of Twitter and Facebook. The level of malevolent hate, ethnic bigotry, incendiary words and totally criminal incitement would put to shame the infamous hate media outlets of the Rwanda Genocide, the newspaper, Kangura, and Radio Télévision Libre Mille-Collines……

Meanwhile, it is clear the Twitter and Facebook bloodletting has been fuelled by Mr Odinga’s legal challenge of Mr Kenyatta’s victory…… Mr Kenyatta’s acolytes are just as busy on social media with their own angry expressions of confidence that the case will be thrown out and the presidency will be back where it belongs….. I wonder, then why they must try to subvert the cause of justice by launching on social media hate campaigns against the Chief Justice and other Supreme Court judges they seem nervous about” (Kretchun 2013; Gaitho 2013).

Social media sites have distinct inherent properties conceptualized as affordances and network functionalities. These properties are seen to reduce the cost of civic and political participation. As we know the resources required for political participation are usually expressed in terms of time, money and civic skills, which include communication and organizational capacities. With online communication, the cost of information retrieval and communication in general falls and political participation becomes less costly (Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, and Wollebæk 2012, 3–4). For the first time also all the presidential aspirants set up social media accounts as a means of reaching out to voters directly. As a result, patterns of mobilization were transformed both in terms of who participates and how they participate

Castells mentions that politics is based on a socialized communication, on the capacity to influence people’s minds (Castells 2007a, 240). The main channel of communication between the political system and the citizens is the mass media system. In our society, and in this case Kenya, politics is primarily media politics. The workings of the political system are staged for the media so as to obtain the support, or at least the lesser hostility of citizens who become the consumers in the political market. This however Castells continues to say that it does not mean power is in the hands of the media as politicians are still seen to exercise a considerable influence over the media. It is said that what does not exist in media
does not exist in the public mind, even if it could have a fragmented presence in individual minds (Castells 2007a, 241).

The impact of the social media was clearly significant at the level of individual agency in the process of political mobilization. Social media played a significant role in facilitating the dissemination of news especially the feature of Twitter’s news propagation in the use of re-tweets which allows users to record the importance they attach to an item of news. Popular tweets therefore spread very quickly through cascades (Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, and Wollebæk 2012, 10).

In addition to re-tweet, hashtags also played a role in targeting online conversations and the communities that had been formed online and also bolster the position of traditional media online. There was a generally high concern of the possibility of another post-election violence and therefore, to counter the hate speech there was a lot of individuals who used Twitter to call for a peaceful election and post-election.

Data collected by one of the country’s media houses, Nation Media House, identified that the following were the three main topics that were most prevalent on social media:

1. The national agenda
2. The presidential aspirants
3. The political parties

*Figure 1. (Daily Nation 2013).*

From the above data we can see that the most talked about issue in social networks during the elections period land and ethnicity followed by national security (Daily Nation 2013).
**Figure 2** (Daily Nation 2013).

We can see the most talked about candidates were the two main rival candidates who had an almost similar amount of mentions in social networks (Daily Nation 2013).

**Figure 3.** (Daily Nation 2013).

In relation to the previous data, we can see that the two leading political parties were mentioned most during the elections period just as it was for the two leading candidates (Daily Nation 2013).
From the data above we can see how the number of tweets increased during the onset of the elections and were at a peak during the election day which was the 4th of March and slowly declined after elections (Hashtags.org 2013).

During the elections it was witnessed that twitter hashtags was an example of how political empowerment can be galvanized by social media. Contributions to the hashtag’s flow of information could somewhat be seen or regarded as an invigorating form of participation in democratic politics (Loader and Mercea 2011, 764). The most prominent hashtags were for instance #kenyadecides, #votepeacefully, #choice2013, #keelections2013, #cord and #jubilee (Hashtags.org 2013). These hastags linked the media to audiences who were previously out of their reach and played an important role in linking news to the audience as well as transforming political newsmaking.

Some scholars have mentioned that people mainly use the internet to inform themselves about the news and the agenda in a participation domain. Although the availability of online news and information does not necessarily cause more
offline participation among the general public, it may support the participation of people who are already active.

Studying parts of the statistics related to the usage of hashtags supports the suggestion above, namely that the content primarily supports the participation of the already active. Figure 6 shows the main hashtags related to #choice2013 on the 4th of March 2013 (election day);

![Figure 6.](cloud.li 2013)

Table 2 shows which hashtags were most used together with #choice2013, and table 3 shows which users using the #choice2013 hashtag had the most followers. Both table 2 and table 3 shows an aggregated view of the timeperiod of 2013-02-18 to 2013-03-18. In total 1675 hashtags were used in relation to #choice2013 by 11845 users during this time period (Hashtags.org 2013). Combining this data with the snapshot shown in figure 6 and the insight that Anne Kiguta is a KTN presenter and Julie Gichuru is a Citizen TV presenter it is reasonable to suggest that the main hashtags were indeed mainly carried by the main news networks online. KTN and The East African Standard were both, by far, also the most prolific tweeters during the 2013 Kenyan elections (Hashtags.org 2013). In this way hashtags became a way of attracting audiences and shaping the news.

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4 Analysis of the Role of New Media Versus Main Stream Media

During the elections period, the media positioned themselves in the internet-mediated communication realm; mainstream media set up direct links to the horizontal network of communication and to their users, so becoming less one-directional in their communication flows, as they relentlessly scan the blogosphere to select themes and issues of potential interest for their audience. During the elections it was also evident, with the incessant call for peace during and after the elections, that actors striving for social change would use the internet platform as a way to influence the information agenda of mainstream media. Just as Castells argues, on the transformation of power relations in a new communication space (Castells 2007a, 252), we could see the interplay on the social media and mainstream media as well as politicians becoming articulated in a reconfigured media system.

4.1 Theorizing Speech, power and counter power

Castells says that throughout history, communication and information have been fundamental sources of power and counter-power of domination and social change. This is because the fundamental battle being fought in society is over the minds of people (Castells 2007a, 238).

Castells goes further to describe that power in the network society in which we live in, is exercised through networks and that there are four different forms of power under these social and technological conditions:

- **Networking Power**: the power of the actors and organizations included in the networks that constitute the core of the global network society over human collectives and individuals who are not included in these global networks.
- **Network Power**: the power resulting from the standards required to coordinate social interaction in the networks. In this case, power is exercised not by exclusion from the networks but by the imposition of the rules of inclusion.
We witness power and counter-power in clear play during the change of the media landscape in Kenya. Castells defines power as the relational capacity to impose an actor’s will over another actor’s will on the basis of the structural capacity of domination embedded in the institutions of society in this case being the electronic media (Castells 2011, 777).

The history of speech about ethnicity in Kenya has seen dramatic shifts. In the 1980s ethnicity was not an overt public discourse. Newspapers and broadcast journalists never mentioned tribal affiliations. One’s ethnic affiliation was not a topic for interpersonal conversation, except among intimates. The government prohibited most groups of people from narrating their experiences as ethnic histories, such as the loss of land under colonialism or political disenfranchisement in the post-colonial era. The discourse of ethnicity shifted in the 1990s, when violent clashes emerged along ethnic lines and resulted in thousands of deaths and displacements. Ample evidence confirms much of the violence was engineered by powerful leaders seeking to divide the population, gain access to resources, and solidify control. When these clashes broke out, the language of ethnicity did as well. Ethnic groups and ethnicity were targeted for blame. Kenya has been characterized by very limited multi-ethnic public space for positive expressions of ethnic affiliation or, relatedly, for the overt negotiation of ethnic relations and the meaning of ethnicity in the post-colonial nation. Most of the positive speech about ethnicity has occurred in intragroup contexts (such as vernacular theater, radio, and publications) and any broader public discussion has emphasized the negative. Throughout the regime of Kenya’s second President, Daniel arap Moi, many actions of political expression were treated as criminal, such as political organizing, meetings between potential political allies, and leaflets outlining political agendas (Hirsch 2013, 7–11).

Kenya’s information and communication technology (ICT) landscape has witnessed large changes over the last decade. InterMedia’s AudienceScapes National Survey of Kenya found that by July 2009, not long after the violence that followed the last presidential election, the mobile phone was the second most widely-available ICT within the household and that growing numbers of mobile phone owners were using their phones to access the Web (Kretchun 2013).
4.2 Hate-Speech and Politics

According to Hirsh, The power of particular utterances, including their power to incite or justify violence, is shaped by the context in which those utterances are spoken. A very simple statement, such as “I am a son of the slopes” uttered in the midst of killing on the basis of ethnicity, becomes extraordinarily powerful and mean something altogether different from their use in more peaceful times. Certainly no longer humorous, and possibly threatening, “I am a son of the slopes” begs questions, such as: “Are you?” “And if you are, what are you going to do about it?” Certain utterances achieve terrifying power, in the right context. In a climate of ethnic animosity In a climate of ethnic animosity, statements of ethnic pride are indistinguishable from insults against one’s opponents. And the converse is also true: even the most hateful or inciteful speech remains benign, if it has no audience or if its audience is firmly and explicitly determined to keep the peace (Hirsch 2013, 7–8).

Radio has traditionally been the leading medium for the dissemination of hate speech in Kenya - a trend reflected by the inclusion of a local radio presenter among the ICC indictees in the aftermath of the 2007/2008 post-election violence. According to the National Human Rights Commission, during the 2007-08 clashes, mobile phone text messages were a powerful tool for organizing vigilante groups and mobs and also a means of spreading provocative messages. To curb this, the government ordered the de-registration of all mobile phone lines that could not be traced to a known users in order to clamp down on people sending out provocative texts (Jorgic 2013).

According to Umati, a project launched by Ushahidi to monitor and report the role of new media in the election, Professor Susanne Benesch of American University has identified factors that make speech more or less powerfull and of which are easily identifiable in the Kenyan context:

- The speaker and his or her influence over an audience – this could be political, cultural or religious leader with a big following. In the Kenyan context this fits well with the radio presenter who is awaiting his hearing at the ICC, Mr Sang. He had the tool to reach a large audience.
- The audience and it’s reason for taking inflammatory speech seriously mainly due to the fact that they are already fearful and only have a single source of information. This especially applying to Kenyans who only listened to vernacular radio of which was often their only source of information on election developments and was unfortunately biased often succeeding in instilling fear and paranoia.
- The content in the speech that was taken as inflammatory this being a serious offence against what is sacrosanct to a community such as the Kikuyu reference constant reference to the Luo’s lack of circumcision etc
- The social and historical context of the speech and in this case the constant referral to the post election violence and the issue of land disputes constantly coming up.
• The means of spreading speech including the language in which it is expressed. During the election period, hate speech was mostly spread in vernacular, this was evident in Twitter as well vernacular run stations. (Umati 2013).

The Umati project subsequently identified dangerous speech as: That targeting a group of people and not a single person. Historically, political leaders in Kenya represent a community and therefore hate speech towards a political figure would often target the community he is from such as hate speech towards Raila Odinga would often be directed at the Luo community and Uhuru Kenyatta at the Kikuyu community. According to Umati, an ugly comment about an individual, a politician in this case, is not hate speech unless it targets that person as a member of a group (Umati 2013).

Dangerous speech was identified as containing a call to action. This encouraging the audience to commit violence acts on the group. Such calls could include; discrimination, riot, call to forcefully evict and kill. These are identified as the most dangerous speech statements.

We see a correlation to the increased use of social media and the use of extremely dangerous speech statements during the weeks leading up and following the elections. An example of dangerous speech taken during the election period:

“I urge all my tribesmen to fight, annihilate, assassinate and execute, when the opportunity will present itself, all those who benefited in this squables. REVENGE!!REVENGE!!REVENGE!!” (Umati 2013)

The Umati team mentioned that a statement such as that mentioned above had the highest potential to catalyze violence as they provide a plan of action that can be well understood and even acted upon by the intended audience (although perhaps not by all readers) (Umati 2013).

On the onset and during the violence, the foreign media were quick to compare the violence in Kenya to the Rwanda genocide. Despite difference in history, ethnicity and politics there was a distinct pattern in the manner in which hate speech was disseminated. These comparisons were however rejected by Kenya journalists and other close observers and instead sought to make sense of violence that had deep roots in Kenyan politics, social relations and history.

A similarity in both countries was the means of dissemination of hate speech which was broadcasted over vernacular radio and other media. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 also saw Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines infamously urge its listeners to participate in the mass murder (Hadland 2010, 122). Just as in Rwanda, radio in Kenya is valued as an authoritative technology especially by the rural community with is more than 80 percent of the Kenyan population. Therefore, broadcasts on radio gained special legitimacy and it is by some that these broadcasts spurred people to violent action who might otherwise have stood on the sidelines. Yet among the many differences between the two conflicts was the extensive use of SMS to communicate hate in Kenya. Compared to Internet
access, mobile phones are far more ubiquitous and could easily be utilized as social media tools. With more than 30 million Kenyans having access to mobile phones, it is evident that the challenge of mobile phones as a mass form of communication arises from their dispersion. This exploitation of new media has quickly became a characteristic of the Kenyan conflict (Hirsch 2013, 2–5).

Another example in of hate speech that has taken part in the Africa is the South African Xenophobia uprising in 2008 that resulted into violence that saw the loss of sixty lives and tens of thousands of people were forced to leave their homes and give up their possessions and businesses. The principal, but by no means sole, focus of this deadly aggression and anger was African immigrants. The targeting of immigrants from African countries led to the violence being described as ‘xenophobic’, an inexact characterization of a phenomenon that affected many South Africans and non-Africans. In the South African case, The Daily Sun, the country’s largest newspaper, was accused for being a material contributor to the xenophobic violence and was complicit in the tragic events that unfolded at that time. The paper was accused to have failed to condemn the attacks and had instead perpetuated negative stereotypes by consistently presented foreign nationals as ‘aliens’ who had manipulated the state in securing unfair access to resources (Hadland 2010, 123).

All three cases in South Africa, Rwanda and Kenya shows that clearly, the allegation of media complicity in violent political crises as becoming more commonplace on the continent begs the questions: to what extent can the mass media be said directly to affect human behaviour? And, even more specifically, what is the correlation between the mass media and violence? (Hadland 2010, 121–122). Hate speech in its many forms; text messaging, radio broadcasts, leaflets and speeches should not be confused with the root causes of conflict and in the case of susceptible nations such as Kenya, would be disputed elections, inequality, economic decline and long standing conflict over land and political power (Hirsch 2013, 2).

During the entire period preceding, during and after the elections both on 2007 and 2013, we see the use of discourses that did not seem related to politics - as happened in Rwanda use of the term cockroach for Tutsi and expressions like ‘go to work’ to mean killing Tutsis – but could clearly understood by protagonists. During the elections period, there was the use of inflammatory inferences such as ‘get rid of weeds’ which was interpreted to non-Kalenjin ethnic groups, mainly the Kikuyu who had bought land in the Rift Valley and were viewed as outsiders, the Luo were referred to as ‘animals of the west’ (Somerville 2011). These inferences drew on cultural differences and negative stereotypes referring back to land and wealth disputes that only reignited the hate polemic that already existed between the tribes.

Despite the effort in spreading information through social media, the social media was however not innocent. Although some weblogs aimed to promote peace and justice, others were used as channels for biased information, tribal prejudices, and hate speech. The online sphere may foster the formation and strengthening of like-minded people and add to the fragmentation of opinions and views, rather than building compromises. Many bloggers took sides, and the
discussion could be ethnically tense. Similarly, while SMS has been a powerful tool for good during and after the elections, it was also used to spread rumors and messages laden with ethnic hatred. It was reported that SMS predicted attacks and called recipients to act on the basis of their ethnicity (Mäkinen and Kuira 2008, 331).

In the wake of the unresolved election results, a significant number of Kenyans on Twitter and Facebook started engaging in hate speech encouraging tribal divisions. Unlike 2007, in 2013 the ferocious divisions between sections of Kenyan society played out on the internet. The online hate speech was mainly between supporters of Uhuru Kenyatta, who are largely from the Kikuyu tribe, and those backing Raila Odinga, from the Luo tribe (Pflanz 2013).

Caesar Handa, the Chief Executive of a company that was contracted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to monitor the media coverage during the 2007 elections was quoted to say: “There’s been a lot of hate speech sometimes thinly veiled. The vernacular radio stations have perfected the art.” Among the FM stations that Handa singled out for criticism were the Kalenjin-language station Kass, the Kikuyu stations Inooro and Kameme and the Luo station, Lake Victoria. He continued to report that the call shows were the most notorious and the announcers did not really have the ability to check what the callers were going to say beforehand. Handa heard Kalenjin callers on Kass FM making negative comments about other ethnic groups, who they call "settlers", in their traditional homeland, Rift Valley Province. Calls were heard of ‘Let's reclaim our land. Let's reclaim our birthright. Let's claim our land meant calling for the eviction of other ethnic communities from a particular area. It was noted that there was a difficulty in monitoring such local vernacular stations since the language used was often quite subtle and obscure (IRINnews 2013).

According to the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) which monitored hate speech in the countdown to the elections, there were some obvious claims such as on Kass FM, there were references to the need for "people of the milk" to "cut grass" and complaints that the mongoose has come and "stolen our chicken". The Kalenjin call themselves people of the milk because they are pastoralists by tradition and the mongoose is a reference to Kikuyus who have bought land in Rift Valley Province. Calls were heard of ‘Let's reclaim our land. Let's claim our land meant calling for the eviction of other ethnic communities from a particular area. It was noted that there was a difficulty in monitoring such local vernacular stations since the language used was often quite subtle and obscure (IRINnews 2013).

Vernacular music played on the radio stations were also used to raise ethnic tensions. The two Kikuyu stations, Kameme and Inooro, played songs "talking very badly about beasts from the west", a veiled reference to opposition leader Raila Odinga and his Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) colleagues, who come from western Kenya and in retaliation, the Radio Lake Victoria played a Luo-language song which referred to "the leadership of baboons". By allowing such sentiments to be voiced on air, observers mentioned that they eventually earn some degree of legitimacy that can be used to justify attacks on other ethnic groups (IRINnews 2013).

Given the role that hate speech is believed to have played in inciting violence in 2007 – radio executive Josua Arap Sang is one of four people currently indicted
by the ICC for the violence – monitoring of hate speech in the media, particularly on the radio had been planned well in advance. Kenya’s National Cohesion and Integration Commission, for example, developed guidelines for media houses on hate speech and engaged directly with them to encourage more “peaceful reporting,” deploying monitors to watch and listen to the news for inciting language. In tandem with such efforts, another Ushahidi endeavor emerged: Umati, “crowd” in Kiswahili, is a project designed using a methodology developed by Dr Susan Benesch of American University to define and monitor “dangerous speech online.” When Umati finds incidents of what is considered to be “extremely dangerous speech,” it is passed along to the authorities and added to the Uchaguzi map (Marchant 2013).

As much as social media might be on the forefront of the shift towards participatory political culture, established media outlets still have a more prominent presence also online (Loader and Mercea 2011). According to data collected during a period of a month before to after the elections, the highest number of impressions on Twitter were from the prominent media organizations these being Aljazeera with 1,10379719 impressions followed by BBCWorld, BBCAfrica and a number of local and international media organizations.

During the first quarter of 2013, Google was actively involved in leveraging its social media platform, Google+, to promote access to information useful to the electorate, and to drive peace and goodwill messages. Google Kenya collaborated with the United Nations System in Kenya, and other partners to encourage Kenyans to ‘Shabikia Amani na Kura Yako’ (Support Peace with Your Vote), using Google+ Hangouts as a cornerstone for the campaign. The national interactive campaign was aimed at engaging Kenyans to promote peace before, during and after the March 4, 2013 general election. Sports personalities from football, rugby and athletics, took part in the campaign, dubbed the “Sports 4 Peaceful Elections” campaign using Google+ Hangouts as the main social media platform. The initiative came after Google Kenya launched its elections hub, a portal where voters, journalists and campaigns were able to easily track news, trends information related to the elections, and its elections YouTube channel, which allowed Kenyans to follow the latest news and trends on the political scene, and engage with each other (Techmoran 2013).

According to Umati, a project launched by Ushahidi to monitor and report the role of new media in the election, found that majority of the people that were considered to have used hate speech and incitement were people that could easily be identified meaning these people left comments Facebook posts, online news articles, forums and blog posts and often used their own names or in some cases pseudo names. The lack of caution when speaking online, according to Umati, suggests that the speakers did not consider the impact of their statements. Majority of the statements were of a discriminatory nature towards other tribes, religion and political parties (Umati Project Team 2012).
According to Figure 6, identifiable commentators showed a clear lead with statements that exhibited a call to kill another group; this was interesting because the most serious call of action was highest among speakers that could be identified either by their Facebook names or pseudonyms used on public blogs and forums. Umati goes further in their report to mention that anonymous commenters reduced as the severity of hate speech increased with the number of identifiable commenters increasing with the severity of hate speech. This can tell us that as much as social media may be deemed to provide an opportunity of anonymity, this is not necessarily the case in other part of the world (Umati Project Team 2012).
Many online comments featured derogatory metaphors historically used to belittle members of other tribes (Pflanz 2013).

**Table 4.** (Kretchun 2013).

The hate speech statements and calls for action collected by Umati that required intervention, were forwarded to Uchaguzi, the multi-stakeholder initiative coordinated through an ICT platform built by Ushahidi, which enables Kenyans to keep an eye on the vote and provide avenues through which they can report any incidences significant to the elections (Umati 2013).

Umati and other similar organizations also mobilized in a more engaged way to disseminate messages of peace in online and other creative platforms both before and after the election. An organization called Youth Agenda encouraged voters to select candidates based on issues instead of along tribal lines by disseminated SMS messages leading up to the vote, and PeaceTXT in collaboration with its field partner Sisi Ni Amani (“We Are Peace”) monitored SMS rumors of hate and engaged to disseminate messages correcting them and promoting peace. Flashcast Kenya, probably the most innovative of the three, used its “location-aware dynamically refreshing text displays” in buses and mobilized them to display texts for peace that riders could submit via SMS. These texts can also be seen on their Facebook page or aggregated on the FlashCast Peace Feed website and Twitter feed (Marchant 2013).

During the hate speech-monitoring period, some questions arose over the viability of the hate speech monitoring when social media has led to the identification of MP Ferdinand Waititu as an alleged inciter of ethnic violence through a popular video clip taken by a rally witness on his mobile phone. And yet, he remained the candidate for the governorship of Nairobi. This raised the question on whether there is any tangible point of monitoring hate speech if the government would not do anything with the information (Hopkins 2013).
4.3 The Power of Mass Self-Communication

Whether overlooked internationally or not, Kenyans were indeed extremely vocal and frequently creative on social media throughout the election. Besides election related news, Kenyans on Twitter took issue with a CNN report indicating that Kenyans were once again preparing for violence ahead of the election reminiscent of 2007. In fact, much of the international media coverage leading up to the election had indeed been focused on such “ethnic tension” and the likelihood of violence. Kenyans took issue with this characterization, not because there was no such tension, but because of the lack of coverage of the peace-promoting initiatives that had been created to combat such tension that many saw as an integral part of the reality on the ground (Marchant 2013).

Aside from Kenyans were seen to be very vocal in preserving the country’s image especially when it came to articles written by foreign journalists that may have depicted the country in a negative manner. The online community witnessed massive online attacks from the Kenya Twitter community. The most popular cyber attack led to the resurgence of the #someoneTellCNN hashtag was a top trending topic on Twitter which was targeted at a journalist who aired a segment on a bus station bombing with the graphic ‘violence in Kenya’. Twitter users in Kenya complained so loudly about the allegedly misleading banner that the hashtag trended worldwide and CNN’s David McKenzie apologized for the graphic (Dewey 2013).

![](image1.png)


#picturesforStuart which took an aim at Stuart Norval an anchor on France 24 who tweeted of ‘dramatic pictures’ of ‘huge crowds falling over each other to vote’ Kenyans tweeted back their own ‘dramatic pictures’ (Dewey 2013).

![](image2.png)

An examples of some of the retaliations to the tweet are:

*Picture 4 (Dewey 2013)*

*Picture 5. (Dewey 2013)*

Other popular hashtags targeting foreign media were #someonetellBBC, #someonetellFrance24, #someonetellBotswana and #someonetellNigeria (Umati 2013)
These different strategies of counter power witnessed indeed confirms Castells theory that states that counterpower is exercised in the network society by fighting to change the programs of specific networks and by the effort to disrupt the switches that reflect dominant interests, in this case the western media, and replace them with alternative switches between networks (Castells 2011, 773).

Marshall Ganz, a leading practitioner and scholar, argues that social movements emerge as a result of the efforts of purposeful actors, in this case being individuals and organizations, to form new relationships, assert new public values, and mobilize political, economic, and cultural power to translate these values into action. They differ from fashions, styles, or fads in that they are collective, strategic and organized (Etling, Faris, and Palfrey 2010, 7).

Theorists such as Yochai Benkler provide useful language to help us begin to understand the place of digital media in society. Benkler’s notion of the networked public sphere describes two ways that digital technologies enable different kinds of communication than their analog antecedents. Benkler writes, “The first element is the shift from a hub-and-spoke architecture with unidirectional links to the end points in the mass media, to distributed architecture with multidirectional connections among all nodes in the networked information environment. The second is the practical elimination of communications costs as a barrier to speaking across associational boundaries (Goldstein and Rotich 2007, 3).

Social movements differ from mobs in a number of ways. First, they are focused on a single, long-term goal in Kenya in 2007/2008 crisis it was focused on providing information that the main stream media could not and in 2013 it was focused on hate speech and creating a state of vulnerability as well as calling for peace. Second, they may take years to achieve that goal, so they are far more persistent and focused than smart mobs or one off political protests. Third, they will have more identifiable leadership to drive the agenda and mobilize participants this is evident with Ushahidi and Mashada spearheading the course of citizen journalism (Etling, Faris, and Palfrey 2010, 8).

A question that may come up in this paper is what is then the relevance of social media and citizen journalism in the processes of democracy? In Kenya, the social media proved to have a remarkable role during the media ban and the national crisis. Social media tools have opened up new possibilities for citizens to share their views in public and discuss the situation with other citizens and people globally. Mobile phones and Web applications have enabled many Kenyans to contact and help relatives in risky areas (Mäkinen and Kuira 2008, 333).
5 Conclusion

To many in the developed world, the ‘networked public sphere’ connotes the potential for a more plentiful public discourse, increased transparency, and positive cooperation of all kinds. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, where artificial borders and legacies of ethnic strife have yet to solidify many countries into nations, the narrative is more complicated (Goldstein and Rotich 2007, 9).

Social media tools supplement, rather than replace, conventional media. Because they serve as channels of expression that could not be easily controlled by the ruling power, they widen and diversify public discussion. They offer critical assessments and unmediated perspectives (Mäkinen and Kuira 2008, 333). However, the issue of whether discussions flowing from the grassroots affect power and the state of democracy remains unexplored.

In the evolution of the Kenyan media, it is clear that it was not only limited to covering the election campaign and informing the citizens. Certain groups or editorials clearly took sides with the candidates in the race. Newspapers and radios were seen to be created by political parties to offer support to their candidates.

During the 2007/2008 and 2013 elections period, web traffic vastly increased and bloggers reached even further audiences when the main stream media picked up on their publications and relayed them on radio. We see social media and blogs during the two incidents being used as spaces for discussion.

New ICT’s have been seen to offer political actors direct contact with citizens and thereby an advantage over existing or traditional media. This in Kenya was especially evident for smaller and less established parties and those that did not receive as much attention in the mass media. We see citizen journalism through social media as an important means of information dissemination in both election periods (Römmele 2003, 9).

However the question still lies on whether digital technology matters in the struggle for democracy. The crises in Kenya both in 2008 and the elections in 2013 are an insight in the emerging power of new media tools. In the Kenyan context, whether aspiring to promote an ethnic-based hate crime or a global human rights campaign, the Internet and mobile phones have lowered the barriers to participation and increased opportunities for many-to-many communication. Clay Shirky gets to the heart of the matter: “The current change, in one sentence, is this: most of the barriers to group action have collapsed, and without those barriers, we are free to explore new ways of gathering together and getting things done.” However, the effectiveness of social media to actually bring about social change is highly contested (Goldstein and Rotich 2007, 9; Haider 2011).

The Kenyan 2013 elections, was a sign that although social media allows for the development of community and collective identity at low cost, this does not
necessarily translate into street action, which is necessary for the success of a protest movement. New technologies might actually make citizens more passive, ‘by leading them to confuse online rhetoric with substantial political action, diverting their attention away from productive activities’ Instead of attending meetings, workshops and rallies, uncommitted individuals can join a Facebook group or follow a Twitter feed at home. This may not motivate them to leave the comfort of their homes to join the chaos of street action (Haider 2011, 5).

Looking at the case study, we can agree with Castells that the emergence of mass self-communication offers an extraordinary medium for social movements and rebellious individuals to build their autonomy. In this case we see social media as a medium and not simply a tool and it is a social construction with its own implication. In addition to this, through the increase of people partaking in hate speech, we see that the public sphere becomes an increasingly contested terrain as it is not only defined as a space for communication but also a space in which a new form of society is given birth and as all other societies, through conflict, struggle, pain and often violence (cf. Castells 2007a, 249, 258).

Due to the high level of participation in the social media arena before and during the elections, we can say that the internet to some degree acts as an arena for political participation especially for those people who would otherwise be unengaged in politics. Given the evidence that that social media is especially popular amongst younger people in Kenya, ages 25 – 34, we can conclude that social groups that would otherwise be politically marginalized are more likely to become active through the internet and that their political actions would most likely unfold on social media platforms (Loader and Mercea 2011, 764–765).

In this study, we have witnessed the internet’s ability in allowing new voices to enter the debate by reducing the influence of gatekeepers and by permitting the rise of citizen journalists to engage in previously expensive journalistic, transparency, or fact-checking endeavors. Bloggers, online forums and other forms of new media have been seen to provide alternative sources of news and information. During the elections, we witnessed more voices on more alternative platforms enabling citizens to criticize the government leaders and policies. However, the issue of whether discussions flowing from the grassroots affect power and the state of democracy remains unexplored. Ideally, social media tools could increase transparency in politics and enhance citizens’ participation through enabling people to follow decision-making processes and hold discussions about issues of common concern. For most Kenyans, however, tapping the Internet for the latest news in crisis is not a real option. Internet access is prohibitively expensive for the majority. There is a need for making new media tools more accessible to those who are less fortunate (Etling, Faris, and Palfrey 2010, 3; Mäkinen and Kuira 2008, 333).

After analysis of the data collected, I feel, at least in the Kenyan case, social media had a limited potential for democratic innovation. The activities online were not as different as the activities offline. It is easy to reject the democratic potential of social media in the case of the Kenya elections especially since social media only seemed to spread hate speech thus negative campaigning and extremism resulting into the sensationalization of the public sphere. Moreover we
see, the network individualism which characterizes social media is regarded as further evidence of the social fragmentation which is seen as corroding collective action and social responsibility (Loader and Mercea 2011, 761–762).

Divisions in the Kenyan media have become blurred with the mainstream media increasingly reliant on political blogs and citizens user content almost lending to the claim that social movements are beginning to stand in a more equal footing with media organizations in their capacity to depict their actions in their own desired light. The Kenyan case also raises questions about the role of the media in fragile states. It is clear that some parts of the local language media played a role in fanning tension and violence. It is also unrealistic to hold the media in Kenya up to a set of ideal standards that exist nowhere else. Most media in most societies are politically biased or aligned in some way (Loader and Mercea 2011, 762 – 763; Ismail and Deane 2008, 326).

Far from all Kenyans are online, but already millions of citizens are debating using social media. As long as journalists actively follow it, the social media debate can always feed into traditional print and broadcast media coverage and reach a wider part of the population. More and more people, however, go online to voice their opinions and we’ve seen far from the full magnitude of the social media phenomenon in Kenya (Orring 2013).

The 2013 election only proved that offline activities can be carried online. In 2007/2008 incitement to violence was conducted through mainstream media as well as in part new media platforms however in 2013, incitement for violence was conducted online resulting into an online battle. In this case the new media provided a larger platform to incitement rather than democratic development.

In conclusion; A significant number of Kenyans are excluded from internet and even though this thesis may show that there was significant activity, this was only made by a fraction of Kenyans. I feel, putting the research conducted into account, Castells theory of power and counter power was supported. Online activities that are generated by mass action or communication can indeed accumulate attention if communication is made for a similar cause. The 2013 election only proved that offline activities can be carried online.
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