Uganda Social Media Conference '19

Social Media and the Prospects
for Digital Politics in Africa

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE PROSPECTS FOR DIGITAL POLITICS IN AFRICA

A Report on the Social Media Conference

25Th June 2019

Xanadu Collection Hotel

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

Uganda
Social Media
Conference '19

**Social Media and the Prospects
for Digital Politics in Africa**

June 25th   Time: 2:00 PM

XANADU COLLECTION KAMPALA
(Former Mackinnon Suites)

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Introduction

On 25 June 2019, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Uganda held the 6th Annual Social Media Conference at the Xanadu Collection Hotel. The theme of this year's conference was 'Social Media and the Prospects for Digital Politics in Africa'. In attendance were journalists, media experts, bloggers, social media influencers, representatives from government, political leaders, civil society and representatives from academia. The conference followed a multifaceted programme with parallel workshops in the morning, a keynote address and panel discussion in the afternoon, followed by a series of parallel activities, including lightning talks, digital campfire conversations and round-table talks.

The purpose of this conference was to facilitate a constructive exchange on the impact of social media on state and society, highlighting both opportunities and challenges.

Social Media Guide for Politicians – Kerstin Welter, Freelance Journalist

With the advent of social media, it has become imperative for politicians and political parties to use the different platforms to engage with the public or their constituents. Insensitive Facebook posts, inappropriate tweets and re-tweets by politicians may have serious social and political ramifications. Kerstin Welter, a freelance journalist from Germany, hosted this session and shared some tips and guidelines for politicians to follow as they build social media platforms to engage more closely with the public. While most of the participants said they used Facebook to interact with their constituents, other social media platforms regularly used turned out to be WhatsApp groups and Twitter, with Telegram, Instagram and YouTube being the least used platforms. It is important for political parties to know the different social media platforms and how they work because it is only with that kind of knowledge that they can actively engage with their constituents.

'It doesn't make sense to be on social media networks when you don't reach people.'

She explained that in Europe, for instance, Instagram has overtaken Facebook as the most used social media platform and all politicians are active on the social network. This offers a better opportunity for them to present themselves because most youths are not on Facebook anymore. To reach more audiences through social media networks, Ms Welter offered valuable tips for political parties and political activists. These were;

- Content planning and distribution for the message to reach many people. Popular platforms such as WhatsApp groups are efficient for this kind of reach as more people may be able to access it.
- Socio-political issues should be presented in a relaxed and playful manner to catch people's attention.
- Content should be easily found anywhere on social media. Political actors must think of the user's perspective: Where are they and where do they yearn to get information from?
- To invoke emotion, content should relate to recognisable topics.
- Content should meet consumer's expectations. It is important to employ high-quality images and visualise heavy and complex information.

Content does not determine the success of a politician on social media; the offline appearance and persona do. People visit a politician's social media to keep up with their personality and only pay attention to the content when they feel it can be trusted.

While platforms such as YouTube are not yet popularly used in Uganda by political parties, they offer a unique opportunity to engage and reach more people. She cited Bobi Wine as an example of politicians who have built their persona and brand through YouTube.

Social media can actively change the political trajectory of a country. In Germany, YouTuber Rezo has used his platform to take on the Conservative Ruling party by using statistics and figures to expose lies and bad decisions the party has made. The video has since been watched more than 15 million times, forcing the party to make a public statement. Rezo and 90 other YouTubers have since released another video sharing a pledge not to vote for the right-wing party. As a result, the party did not get enough votes. Despite the fact that politicians in Germany have sizeable followings on social media, no one thought a case like Rezo's would happen. Why Rezo's post became so successful was because of his popular internet persona as well. For Ugandan politicians to build strong brands and reach more people, they need to build a persona online that can be seen through their social media communication. To become an internet persona, a politician should choose something that stands uniquely for them, such as colour, song, language, tone and clothing. There is still massive potential for Ugandan political parties to increase their reach and they should, therefore, make use of that potential.

Following the discussion, one participant asked about what the incentive was for Rezo to post the video. Ms Welter responded that youth in Germany are slowly becoming political activists. There are movements, such as the Friday Future Movement, whose focus is concern about the environment and climate change. Through this movement, students march on the streets every Friday to compel politicians to make clearer decisions about saving the climate. Another participant observed that from watching Rezo's video, she got the feeling that he may have been coached by someone. This, she said, is often the feeling she gets when she watches local politicians such as Bobi Wine. However, Ms. Welter said Rezo was not coached by anyone as he used available statistics and information to back up what he talked about. Although YouTube offers an opportunity for new engagements with audiences, one participant noted that most of the content they post on their channel is often watched by Ugandans in the diaspora. This was attributed largely to the fact that there are still challenges that make it difficult for people to affordably access the internet in Uganda.

People respond more to content that is controversial in nature and, therefore, cause a lot of debate compared to content that is given to give information to audiences – to help educate them on pertinent issues.

Challenging Negative Narratives on Social Media – David Girling, Senior Lecturer, University of East Anglia, UK.

This session was hosted by David Girling, senior lecturer at the University of East Anglia, with seven years of experience in academia. Noting the gap in social media at the university, he started a blog, social-media-for-development.org, which gave him access to top search engines. He has since been recognised by *The Guardian* as one of the most interesting people talking about development to follow online. This acknowledgement pushed him to gain over 10,000 followers in a short time, similar to some of the biggest institutions and people in the world, including Melinda Gates and the President of New Zealand.

Many people and organisations get social media wrong; they only use it for broadcasting to people, making it unidirectional. A great example of an institution using social media effectively is the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), which responds to every person's queries within six minutes. This engagement is very good because people are used to being ignored by their government agencies/service providers. Highlighting the inequities of social media, David Girling noted that the people, like musicians and journalists, who had a lot of influence and power on social media already had the power, influence and power offline.

'It is difficult to gain influence if you don't have it already.'

To change policy in the UK, citizens target politicians and civil servants or mobilise the general public around an issue they want to be changed. The media then picks it up, forcing politicians to pay attention to it. Targeting politicians specifically might not work.

One participant asked about the importance of religious leaders and their influence. David Girling responded that religious leaders don't have much power in the UK, but that they can definitely be targeted in Uganda and Africa where they have influence. Another participant asked whether any of Mr Girling's social media campaigns have achieved real change, to which he responded that they had.

Gender stereotypes on social media

Social media statistics for Uganda as of May 2019, produced by We Are Social:

- **64.5 per cent of Ugandans on social media use Facebook**
- **20.64 per cent use Pinterest**
- **9.62 per cent use Twitter**
- **3.26 per cent use YouTube**
- **1.17 per cent use Instagram**
- **0.26 per cent use Reddit**

The following comparison of the total addressable advertising audience of selected social media platforms in Uganda for January 2019 shows that on all platforms, male users are reached more than female social media users.

How Africa tweets

In 2015, 1.6 billion tweets were posted in Africa of which 20 per cent were about entertainment, and 10 per cent about politics, compared to the UK with only 2 per cent of the tweets being about politics. One of the key findings was that politicians have a limited role in driving conversations online, with local journalists and news outlets having greater influence. Tech fixes can do little to address the underlying structural problems driving the gender divide and gender biases *(Bridging the Digital Gender Divide, OECD, 2018).* Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics, a book by Nanjala Nyabola, emphasises the importance of offline activism as much as social media activism. For example, when you look at the Arab Spring, was it really just a Facebook revolution or was it that the organisations had the structure to enable people to mobilise? There was a lot of activity offline which complemented the activity online.

Social media is not a panacea that is going to solve all the problems of society, but it does enable people to mobilise and to have conversations. It is important for society to be changed so that the asymmetrical visibility disappears (FUCH, 2014). As social media influencers, how do you stop that asymmetry? Capitalist structures of accumulation operate, not just in the economy, but also in a culture where they result in the accumulations of reputation, visibility and attention of the few. A paper by OECD on women's voices in decision-making processes says that despite the high visibility and success of many online campaigns, the extent to which women's online activism has been able to shape and influence policy-making remains patchy and unpredictable. Some of these campaigns get lost online because of the attention economy on social media. Some of the barriers to women's political agency are:

- **Women's limited access to new technologies**

In low- and middle-income countries, women have less access to mobile phones and mobile internet use. Key barriers for women here include affordability, literacy and skills, safety and security and relevance.

- **Limited networking with institutional actors**
- **Information overload**
- **Censorship and harassment**

Recommendations for Enhancing Women's Online Advocacy

- Training women to make greater use of information technology for communication and the media.
- Increasing women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.
- Involving a cross-sector team of actors, including grass-roots women's networks, traditional media and men.

A 2018 social media paper by KAS Uganda summarises a lot of issues in social media usage in Uganda and covers a lot of research on the existing guidelines and general observations. The outstanding guidelines are the Government of Uganda Social Media Guide 2013 and KCCA Social Media Guidelines 2016. However, social media is ever changing and there is a need to frequently update these tools. For the local government, the report indicated that only 3 per cent of offices had computers. Despite this however, capacity-building had been undertaken and 130 government officials had been trained in social media use.

Mr Girling advised that organisations that do not have the ability to run social media accounts should hire someone that has a passion for it. To emphasise the need to understand one's audience, he gave the example of Joe and Jono, social media geniuses who have mastered the art of online communication and understand their audience well enough to effectively engage with them.

There is inequity, stratification and homophily on social media. Homophily can be explained with the phrase 'birds of a feather flock together'. Social media makes people more homophilous; social media friends are usually people who know one another, acquaintances or other colleagues. This is part of the problem because a user only follows people who are like them. There is a need to follow people outside one's immediate circles in order to gain exposure to different views and more information.

Ending stereotypes on social media

In a campaign to stop stereotypes in charity adverts, Radi-Aid, a fake NGO set up by Norwegian students, got about 20,000 dollars from the Norwegian Government to do what they wanted and they decided they wanted to stop stereotypes in charity campaigns. They created a parody of Band Aid's 'Do They Know It's Christmas', which elicited a lot of criticism basing on the idea that people in Ethiopia are much more likely to know it's Christmas than anybody in the UK. They had a choir from South Africa make up a new song about sending radiators back to Norway. There were shots of poor Norwegians struggling to get up hills and slipping down slopes. The campaign had 3 million views and went on to influence 200 media adverts around the world. For the next five years, an award for good and bad charity adverts was set up where a panel would nominate good charity videos and bad ones.

Social media can make a difference in the way countries in Africa are portrayed. David Lammy, a vocal Labour politician in the UK, tweeted about the world not needing more white saviours as it perpetuates tired and unhelpful stereotypes. His tweet garnered a lot of conversation on social media, a clear example of one politician challenging stereotypes. This story was covered by every news station in the UK. Some of the Instagram accounts challenging negative stereotypes;

- *@Barbiesavior*, who is using humour and irony to try and shame people like volunteers who post things like that.

- *@everydayafrica*

- *@Kiberastories* documents everyday life in Nairobi. It was started by a photographer who grew up in Kibera.

- *@everydaymumbai*

- *@humansofny*

To change the representation of a city or country, its citizens need to actively contribute to social media.

Popular social media gender campaigns

- In 2014, UN Women held a campaign with pictures showing common Google searches on 'women cannot…' and 'women shouldn't…'. UN Women emphasised that 'women cannot accept the way things are' and 'women shouldn't suffer from discrimination anymore'.

- *#HeForShe*. This campaign was started by UN Women and kicked off by Emma Watson to advance gender equality and to get men to pledge to make a difference by advancing gender equality. The campaign garnered 1.1 million tweets in two weeks. It's still going on, and now has 750,000 different users, 1.3 billion conversations and 1.5 million pledges to advance gender equality.

- *#ThisGirlCan*. Started in 2015 by Sport England, this campaign promotes body positivity. There have been 23 million tweets with the hashtag. It came out after the Olympics where research showed that in the UK, men exercise more than women.

- *#IAmHere*. This campaign was started by Nina who has lived in Uganda and is married to a Ugandan. It has over 10,000 volunteers who go onto Facebook looking for racist and misogynistic comments. What they do is follow the people responsible for such comments and try to change them or make a difference by engaging with them.

A social media actor to consider is Jameela Jamil, an actress with over 747,000 followers on Instagram, who uses social media to address campaigns on body positivity and sexism.

Women are seen as the constant victims of stereotyping, but also as the ideal agents of change. As a result, international organisations such as UNICEF, USAID and Oxfam have been running positive campaigns on a number of topics like menstruation and gender-based violence. When these strategies are being created, there's the idea that the girls in the Global North will be able to connect with the girls in the Global South, but that does not happen because these campaigns often become an opportunity for people to talk about themselves.

How social media can help to reduce stereotypes

In a group discussion, the participants explored the ways in which social media has been used to reduce stereotypes. There are many stereotypes on social media, including racial and sexual ones. There have been a number of campaigns, such as Nike and Gillette's videos, that attempt to demystify these stereotypes. Movements like #Metoo create awareness which has enabled people to speak about their experiences of sexual harassment. Influencers popularise hashtag campaigns which reach more people and result in behavioural change. Promoting campaigns through advertising or media houses like the BBC provide information on how to reduce stereotypes and encourage everyone to join the campaign and challenge the stereotypes. Social media is a platform for expression and everyone has a chance to express themselves. However, fear of criticism that comes from social media prevents people from speaking up.

International brands have played a great role in shattering stereotypes; for example, Gillette's advert in support of Caster Semenya. However, there has been a lot of criticism in brands' participation in social media campaigns.

Social media should be a place for policy change through challenging policies, for example, those that are gender-insensitive, and in signing petitions. In terms of digital literacy, there is a need to create enough awareness and a platform for people to freely express themselves. Social media promotes confidence as it acts like an echo chamber through which people can engage. The Girl Effect is a safe space specifically for girls to speak anonymously. This initiative has done a lot of research on gender equality, conducted campaigns and released a survey on gender equality. Black No Suga is a platform where women address and discuss the issues that affect women. A phrase 'manel' has been coined to advocate balanced panels which give female perspectives on issues like budget discussions.

The media draws on social media and vice versa. This can be seen in Kenya with the success of the My Body, My Choice campaign. On many newspapers the majority of columnists are males, and these are in a bubble and sometimes it takes social media to rally support for issues that they might not write about. In Uganda, however, there is a disparity between online activism and offline action because of the consequences of street activism.

How can the digital public sphere help influence policy?

There has been a change since the advent of social media. Uganda has a policy on domestic workers in the Arab world now following videos showing the dire conditions in which Ugandan maids work in the Middle East. The videos that reveal the torture and death of persons working in Jordan, Oman and other countries and appeals to people like the katikkiro (prime minister) of Buganda to intervene have had an impact. For example, labour export companies now pay a 60-million-shilling registration fee, which makes it harder for disreputable companies to export

labour. Also, the Rusiina statue at the Mbarara roundabout was maintained because of rallying through social media. The OTT, which started at 1 per cent, was reduced to 0.5 per cent because Ugandans on social media spoke up against it and searched for ways to evade it. Hashtags like #FreeBobiWine, despite the majority of the tweets being from Kenya, yielded some semblance of justice.

Reducing inequities in the digital public sphere

To stop looking at the digital public sphere in single terms, there is a need to widen the scope, making it more inclusive. Further, there is a need for the discussion to shift from the elite to the general public through capacity-building and digital literacy programmes for people who don't know how to use social media platforms, showing them the benefits of contributing. There is a difference between digital literacy and social media literacy, which necessitates digital training. The idea that the youth are the ones with knowledge of social media should be debunked to promote inclusion. It is important to have people with influence use their social media platforms to highlight social issues and contextualise what they disseminate.

Many opinions were expressed following the group discussions guided by David Girling. One participant advised that children should know the proper way to use electronic gadgets before they can gain access to them. The participant added that, in fact, digital literacy should be included in the curriculum. Another participant stressed vigilance to ensure security in information sharing.

Another participant opined that the hindrances to using social media in Uganda could explain why the country is not very vocal online: It is difficult to things related to technology – issues such as network accessibility, affordability and reliability of the internet. Some of the principles, such as safe spaces, fail to strike the right balance between the desire to protect vulnerable groups and to make sure that we aren't shielding the young people from confronting views they are uncomfortable with. Social media can be an outrage machine. On freedom of expression, Girling noted that the concept of free speech varies from place to place. Self-censorship offline is the same as online, and there is a need to be careful about what is shared online because it can be used damagingly offline. Ultimately, it is important to develop a thick skin and refrain from expressing harmful views. Social media ethics is a broad subject and it comes down to how individuals think and engage with other users.

Social Media Dos and Don'ts for Civic Engagement

Social media presents unique opportunities for civic engagement, but it comes with a flip side. Nanjala Nyabola, writer, storyteller, lawyer and activist using the internet as a platform for social justice and humanitarian activism, led this workshop. To contextualise the discussion, activism was defined as giving people a path for action to do things that will change their societies, and how they interact with the social aspects of their communities. This session explored how to make the most of social media for activism.

Mapping the landscape. Where do people get their news from?

Almost everyone checks their phone every morning with email, WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook being the most popular platforms. However, very few people buy newspapers every day or once a week, or watch the news every day and listen to the radio. According to a recent study, 78 per cent of Kenyan households have a radio. This shows that radio is still important. However, the pattern of news gathering has changed over the years. Twenty-nine years ago, radio was the only way of getting information from the government. For example, if a minister was to be fired, people would hear about it on the radio. This has changed now and everyone can access news anytime, anywhere.

Multiple studies have been conducted in the US and the United Kingdom on internet usage and social media. About four in 10 Americans get their news online. The use of online news outlets has risen a lot in the last few years and print media has declined. Some radio programmes have been transformed into podcasts to keep up with the changing trends of news consumption. For example, Fresh Air with Terry Gross, a popular radio talk show that has been running for 30 years, was restructured into a podcast and still attracts many listeners. This research has also shown the patterns through which different age groups get their news. Eighteen to 24-year-olds are likely to get information online while people who are 65 and above usually get their information from television. This is reflected in how different stories travel and how people understand specific social aspects. For example, during the Brexit vote in the UK, older Britons were more likely to vote for Brexit than younger people. Therefore, television and radio carried more messages on Brexit. The underlying issue is that coverage on television and radio was heavily influenced by certain political interests, whereas online information contested this narrative. According to the OECD, 1 per cent of people in Europe, North America and Japan don't read the news on any social media platform.

There has been a significant growth of social media as the main source of news. Brazil has the highest rate of social media growth, which is reflected in the political behaviour of Brazilians, as demonstrated by the influence of WhatsApp in the last election. The current president of Brazil is the opposite of the former president, who was much more left-leaning. As people tried to understand how that changed very quickly, it was discovered that WhatsApp had played a great role in changing this narrative. Videos that were shared on WhatsApp shifted the conversation around key issues of LGBT rights, a social entitlement which basically shows that, except for Finland, there was an increase in the number of people getting their news from social media in 2016 and 2017. This makes social media critically important in the news space.

Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the US, with 64 per cent of the population on the platform, and of these, 30 per cent are using it for news. Fifty-one per cent of the population uses YouTube and 10 per cent of these use it to access news and information. Of the 60 per cent Twitter users, 8 per cent use the platform for news. What does this say about the place of Facebook in political and social conversations?

Facebook has a massive impact on shaping opinions and how people understand issues. Whereas it always maintains that it is not a news outlet but a social networking platform, Facebook continually adjusts itself to optimise news content. This has had both positive and negative outcomes. When Facebook switched the algorithm to produce more news content in 2015, a lot of websites started to mimic news sites. For a Facebook user, friends' posts were getting less traction on the home page than a news article or link. A lot of websites invested in expanding their digital presence and later, when Facebook decided to push video content, a lot of people started creating videos. Last year, though, it emerged that Facebook had been manipulating the numbers on how successful video content was as they established partnerships with prominent news outlets such as the New York Times, BuzzFeed and The Guardian, encouraging them to produce more optimised videos. In actual sense, videos weren't getting many views because people were scrolling past them and going directly to their friends' pages to see what they were doing. As a result, BuzzFeed and the New York Times retrenched 200 and 100 employees, respectively, people whose jobs became obsolete owing to the change in content preferences. The algorithm has since been changed and Facebook has gone back to showing users' networks and friends' posts. This shows content creators how little control they have over what their content can do because they are not writing the algorithms and, therefore, do not have a say in what people see.

The trend in the UK is similar to that in the US. Eighty-four per cent of 18–24-year-olds get their news primarily online, compared to 54 per cent of people over 55 years, who get their news from television. This suggests that people are consuming more political information online. However, what are the vulnerabilities when people get their information from online sources?

How would this study look for Uganda?

One participant said there would not be many differences between the UK and US data. In Uganda, as well, young people consume online news rather than buying newspapers or watching television. Because of the increased phone penetration in the country, technology is cheaper, so people have access to the internet and can get online and search for information. Another participant held that since the population of people on social media in Uganda is low, more people are consuming news through the print media, television and radio. Another opinion was that different categories of people interact differently with the internet. The institution of repressive laws, such as the OTT tax, has attracted limited engagement on social media.

The number of young people (18 – 24) engaging on social media has reduced because few can afford the daily tax and the majority use VPNs, which are expensive in the long run. Social media use is heavy among the 25–34 year age group in Uganda. In rural areas, the use of social media is still low. Because of these limitations, more people get their news from television and radio, which are the top sources of news and information. Because fake news is rampant in Uganda, people rely on traditional media because it takes steps to verify its sources, unlike online news where anyone can be a contributor, even without credibility. Owing to the high cost of living and of data, people's online engagement is limited, especially in rural areas.

It is important to domesticate research and place it in the local context. Kenya has statistics on internet use but they do not completely present a clear picture of internet usage. According to research, there is a 110 per cent smartphone penetration in Kenya but, in essence, what this means is that whereas some people in Nairobi have up to three smartphones each, some people in Turkana may not have even one. The statistics show that everyone is excited about digital advancement. However, why isn't it translating into greater online activity?

For Ms Nyabola, the key questions to answer are: Who is online? What are they using online platforms for? Kenyans are more likely to use Twitter for political engagement than the people in the US.

It is also important to have a conversation on fake news. In Kenya, the top creator and conveyer of fake news is the government, which uses the internet to spread misinformation. This eventually leads to mistrust of sources of information because of the way media has been used to spread propaganda. This intersects with preexisting ideas of trust and believability. As a result, young Africans online are more sceptical about information available online than Europeans, because propaganda comes from different directions, so they process it differently.

Challenges of using social media for civic engagement

Compassion fatigue is one of the biggest challenges associated with using social media for civic engagement. There are too many conflicts to keep up with, too much suffering in the world, so people may get tired. Questions like 'What am I supposed to care about today?' arise from the sensory overload. How do you filter what is important and what is not?

Impact of social media on audience behaviour

The way news is consumed has changed. Reading now takes more time because there is more variety and social media is curated, which means that someone will see news from sources they care about. What this means for the way people view the world is that while everyone is talking about one crisis, something else is happening that your timelines are not showing. As budgets for media are reduced, traditional media, too, relies on social media for clues to information.

The constantly shrinking civic space for human rights work presents a great challenge. East African domestic democracy is at its worst in history at the moment.

There is also the 'breaking' fatigue, where online sources are constantly seeking attention for their news by attaching 'Breaking News' to stories, even when a story does not qualify to be a breaking news story. This leaves the reader confused regarding which story to pay attention to and which not to.

What is the goal of communication?

Cohesion, information and education, influence, expression, and developing social relationships are the goals of communication. The best way to get the best out of social media is to constantly reflect on the basics of why we are online in the first place. While some people share information online for the sake of it, because they have time and access to the internet, a communications professional runs the risk of becoming irrelevant. This is because people see and know when you are not being authentic.

In her experience of using social media, Ms Nyabola considers whether or not what she is posting pushes the conversation forward. Online engagement should be purposeful and the information shared should be examined to determine whether it is positively contributing to the conversation. This helps to create a space for people that seek these kinds of conversation. When a social media user develops a pattern, people will expect consistency. It is important to balance the grim and often depressing news with pop culture and other random conversations to keep the temperature even. In positioning oneself as a communications expert, it is vital to know why you are doing what you are doing. Resist the urge to put out information simply because you have it because the audience will eventually stop paying attention.

The uses of social media in humanitarian organisations

In the short term, social media helps to improve understanding of complex situations that may not get elaborated in the news bulletin. It shames power into action. For example, tweeting MTN when there is a problem causes them to act immediately. Social media publicly amplifies an issue, forcing people to act while also creating space for action. Sharing news on the concentration camps at the US border, where children are held in dismal conditions, has stirred a conversation which has created space for action since more people are now talking about it. This gives ordinary people a tool to force action.

In the medium term, social media helps in sustaining space for particular issues. As the news cycle changes fast owing to constant news, social media presents a platform where people can carry on with a conversation. According to media experts, the best day to share an in-depth story is Tuesday. This is because Monday involves processing weekend information and the news usually carries big government announcements. Tuesday is the most boring day for news and people have time to read, react and process. Using social media encourages the general public to participate, by witnessing and documenting human rights violations for possible action, for example, the use of Bellingcat. This is an open source investigation platform that is building evidence for future investigation basing on what people put on social media. It has been activated in Syria, Sudan and in other places where humanitarian crises are unfolding. When someone shoots a video, they capture more information than they realise and this information can later be used in an investigation. Ms. Nyabola gave the example of Cameroon, where the police were filmed killing a woman. While they denied this, claiming the video had been recorded in Nigeria, investigators along with the BBC used Bellingcat to assess the video, analyse and establish that the video had been recorded in Cameroon. The people who were implicated in that video are currently facing prosecution. Videos shared online can have an impact in reinforcing human rights principles.

In the long term, social media can be used to reinforce legal and political norms, end conflict or rights violations, and promote behavioural change in the general society. Ms Nyabola cited the Kenyan #MyDressMyChoice campaign in 2013 as an example of behavioural change. Undressing women had happened before in Nairobi but in 2013, there was social organising which led to a conversation on women in Nairobi and how they occupy public spaces.

On raising awareness, she cautioned against sensationalising in social media in a bid to raise awareness and the importance of putting out a call to action with every news story. Raising awareness should not stop at spreading information and eliciting sympathy but a challenge for people to do something, to move the conversation forward. She further advised against bombarding readers with information and not telling them what to do with it. This runs the risk of causing compassion fatigue where the audience feels powerless and disengages as a result.

One participant offered best practice guidelines from a book by Nicholas Christoph, entitled *Half the Sky,* which documented women's stories all over the world. As he goes into detail as he discusses women's lives in the book, he also provides practical ways in which readers could support the women.

Fundamentally, a communications professional should communicate with empathy. Audiences are saturated with information so it is imperative that they are given reason to pay attention to one particular source. Why should they listen? Why should they follow you? Understanding the audience, their needs and what you can offer goes beyond thinking on the surface.

Mapping the landscape: Who are the core audience?

The audience is divided into insiders and outsiders. Insiders are the people who know what you are talking about without necessarily providing context while outsiders are those who would need some context. For example, people who follow African politics will understand something about Africa easily. Insiders are people who know the jargon and are not intimidated by it, people whose opinions/expressions of opinion are conditioned by expert knowledge. They include experts in the industry, government officials and agencies. Outsiders can be media practitioners, public intellectuals, thought leaders and the general public. Understanding the core characteristics, skills and interests of the audience shapes how messages are constructed and disseminated.

Communication is giving people the tools they need to process the information, whether they are insiders or outsiders. Nanjala encouraged unpacking conversations using humour and breaking complex issues down so everyone can understand them with clarity.

Challenges: What are you up against?

Using social media for civic engagement and activism presents several challenges, such as saturated audiences. The pattern of consumption is changing from buying papers to checking your phone every morning for news.

Content versus information: Content refers to the inside story, more subjective information. Because news cycles have changed, it is important to keep the audience hooked. Websites like BuzzFeed must generate content every day. Content does not necessarily need fact-checking. Content is occupying a given space and not trying to achieve so many goals. Information shouldn't look like content, and people have to know what is important and what is not. Information is different and should not be packaged as content.

Contests against the banal: There is competition for online attention from more popular and influential people who garner a massive following. These are people who have the money and time to expand their audiences, like the government that has specialised units to curate and send out information.

The participants mentioned these as the other challenges of social media:
- The systematic abuse of social media platforms
- Hacking
- Fake news
- High costs of the internet
- Cyberbullying
- Digital security

It is important to separate individual social media accounts from professional accounts. This helps to maintain credibility. Communications practitioners should never say anything online that they cannot defend or say offline.

Key social media platforms

Social media platforms can be open or closed and different messages work better across different platforms. As a marketplace, open media, such as Twitter, is open to the whole world, geographically and professionally. A user can pick up a new audience member all the time. Closed networks include Facebook, where a user can only engage with people they are connected to. Networks like LinkedIn are semi-closed. They have the biggest number of adjustments a user can make to the way people can see your profile. WhatsApp, Signal and Telegram are some of the closed networks which are sometimes known as dark socials. People cannot see who is in a particular network. Unlike Facebook, dark social media platforms cannot be used to influence their subscribers through advertising. In terms of security, WhatsApp users can enable double end encryption. These nuances shape what the different platforms are used for.

In working with persons with disability, it is important to pay attention to the platforms used so as to promote inclusion. Facebook provides the option of description of an image which blind people can view with braille. Which platform is the best for communicating to all audiences?
It is important to stay on top of the rising social networks. To do this, it is imperative that the fundamental questions are asked: Why are you online? If you, as an organisation, you don't need to be on Snapchat, you don't have to.

One participant asked whether using different socials is an effective way to get more groups interested in your content. Ms Nyabola responded that it is important to know that you are communicating, not just occupying a space. The best social media accounts are those that have mastered the art of curation.

'Not everything needs to be on social media,' she said. 'When you are doing many things you are not curating, it is an information dump where you will lose people. You get more out of certain platforms than others. The challenge is having many people paying attention for a short time or a few people paying attention for a long time. It is important to know which social to use for which audience. Understand your core audience. Ask the questions: Why am I here? What am I trying to say, to who?'

Social media works when a user understands their cause, objectives, medium, audience and has the resources to sustain this action. It works when online work is supported by offline action/connections.

Notes on social media

It is important to define what online success looks like for an organisation or online activist. If it is to transfer information, then retweets are a great way to measure success; but if is to measure impact, the website/link clicks would count more.

For Twitter, reach is deceptive because it does not entirely translate into the number of clicks on a link and also accounts for retweets by other users. Sometimes the reach is high but the number of people interacting with the story might not be interacting with the particular account. Reach is more difficult to measure because the story takes on a life of its own with more people viewing it. It accounts for everyone who has seen the tweet.

Virality versus impact: Virality means that millions of people are seeing a video posted online and impact is the call to action. People often seek virality instead of impact. Impact measures the results of the information put on the internet, such as: Did anyone donate to the campaign? Virality is good as a social media metric but if the goal is to create impact, it is important to consider if you actually engaged with your audience.

Moments versus movements: It is easy to create a moment. However, a movement has momentum. It goes beyond time and requires a long, more intellectual understanding of impact and audiences. While social media is great for movement building and activism, there are some limits to what it can do:

- Social media is not great with direct political action. Were systems are entrenched, social media will struggle.
- It cannot fix things online that people don't want to fix offline, e.g. racism, classism, poverty.
- It cannot craft complex and nuanced narratives.
- Social media cannot sustain intense engagement over extended periods of time.
- It cannot overcome algorithms and echo chambers.

The objective should be to ensure sustained engagement with complex issues over time. Judging from the history of social media, the platforms that we adore today might not exist in ten years. So, it is vital to keep sight of the long-term goals of social media engagement.

It is crucial to distinguish between emergencies and communication aimed at behavioural change – and sometimes a low but sustained engagement is better.

Avoid long threads. When sharing information on Twitter and it requires more than 10 threads, it is wiser to write an article instead. Long threads are not good because of short attention spans. Depending on what the goal is, threads are a good tool, but if the goal is to inform or educate, few people are going to click long threads. This also applies to long essays on Facebook.

Foundations of storytelling

The objective of storytelling is to tell human stories with empathy. The same ethical principles of storytelling we abide by offline should be maintained online – kindness, respect, avoid exploiting the vulnerable, representation and inclusiveness, empathy. Offline ethics should be maintained online. While social media is tuned to make people the most aggressive version of themselves, it is important to be kind.

Avoid information dumps. Ms Nyabola reiterated that information should not just be churned out on social media without context. Complex reports, statistics and stories should be broken down.

Engagement is crucial. It is important to talk to people online because it creates a community. It means that people on your feed are interested. For Twitter, a user can do Twitter audits to determine whether or not their followers are authentic people or bots.

Ethical implications of using images

These are the general ethical considerations of using images:

- Do people need to see people suffering to believe it is real?

- Death doesn't absolve one of the right to protect people.

- Respect people's privacy and dignity. Protect people's homes and schools.

- Do not rely on shock because people become desensitised to shock.

- People often experience secondary trauma triggered by images and videos.

- Instead of showing people's faces in sensitive cases, images of hands or backs can be used to portray the story.

Ms Nyabola conducted an image test and asked the participants to exercise viewer discretion while looking at the images displayed on the screen because they were sensitive and could possibly trigger secondary trauma. She asked everyone to think about the considerations in using these images.

The first image was a picture that was captured during the 2016 European panic about migration. A three-year-old boy had washed up on the beach in Italy from the Mediterranean Sea on a journey from Turkey. In 2015, 3,300 men, women and children died in transit from Turkey as they escaped war and their dead bodies had washed up on the beach. While this picture triggered a lot of conversation, the ethical consideration remains: Should we be putting pictures of dead children on the web? What about the family? While humanitarian organisations use these images to fundraise and advocate, don't we need consent from the dead?

The second image was that of a distraught man on a boat, clutching onto children believed to be his. An emotional picture, it moved people from sympathy to empathy because it showed real life, real people who can be helped. Beyond stirring feeling, this image played into the gender conversation by depicting a man crying in pain. It showed the direness of the situation. In the gender perspective, what does the picture of a man crying and comforting his children do that the picture of a woman doing the same does not? Are we playing into gendered tropes when we go along with this?

The third picture showed very many people hanging onto a capsizing boat in the middle of a large water body. What questions linger when you see this photo? How do you deal with that sense of peril in your audience? What should the ethical follow-up of this be? What information should be included in the description of this picture? As the photographer, how do you proceed after taking this picture? What is the political objective of the picture? Does it move from sensationalism to action?

Tips for activism

- Do not be boring. Learn from pop culture, how the top musicians, artists use social media. Learn from that. How do they keep people coming back? How do you talk about self without talking about self?

- Keep your eye on the prize. Don't win today's argument and lose tomorrow's campaign. Humanise your account and include personal stories.

- Remember the value of interaction. Respond to people – amplify positive reviews especially but avoid unnecessary confrontation.

- What is live tweeting good for? What are the best approaches?
- Keep your eye on the prize – short-, medium- versus long-term goals. Don't forfeit long-term victories for short-term gains. Maintain focus.

There is a need to make information work for digital audiences and the importance of curation. With regard to curation, social media is a curated account of an organisation or activist's life. Not everything matters and not everything matters the same way. The image portrayed on social media should be consistent. It is vital to create a framework and stick to it on social media while keeping personal aspects out.

The Main Panel and Plenary Session

The afternoon session of the conference was opened to the general public by Mathias Kamp, country representative of KAS Uganda. In his welcome remarks, he expressed gratitude for everyone's participation in social media conferences since 2015. He mentioned the objective of the social media conference, which was to focus on its implications for society. The main panel would focus on digital prospects for social media in Africa. In his view, people feel much less restricted on social media. It is a platform where ordinary people turn into bloggers and influencers and are not bound by media laws. However, is there such a thing as ethical conduct for bloggers and influencers? He reiterated that social media has played a key role in exposing sexual harassment and starting campaigns such as the #JusticeForSamantha campaign.

Keynote Address: Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics: How the Internet Era Is Transforming Politics in Africa.

The keynote address was made by Nanjala Nyabola. She started off with a flashback from 2017, where the Kenyan presidential election had been challenged. Owing to the irregularities that marred the election, lawyers for the opposition wanted to audit the results to make sure that the election results were, indeed, correct. However, the details of the election could not be scrutinised because the lawyers for the state said they couldn't open the servers because they were in France and the people in France were asleep. Through this experience, Kenya learnt so much about who they were as a nation. This captured the paradoxes the country is dealing with, i.e. making progress or retrogressing. Kenya is not the biggest or richest country in Africa, it does not have resources in abundance, nor does is it even have the highest population. How, then, is it that it is the most talked about country in the context of digital development? Why does The Economist run stories on MPesa every so often? In 2016, Kenya had the highest amount of mobile transactions in the world, which contributed one-third of the country's GDP.

Her book, Nanjala Nyabola said, is about history and people. Kenya's embracing of technology is not accidental and it is tied to the 2007 general election where 1,500 people died and 500,000 were internally displaced. The country was divided and the principles made four different agreements to ensure this never happened again. The Independent Review Commission said that the main problem in 2007 was that the election was not transparent, and there was no trust. If people could be made to trust the election system more, there would be less uncertainty. Technology would fix this problem. The easiest way to do this was to introduce computers into the process of elections in Kenya. Embracing the digital life led to a digital election in 2018 and the installation of fibre optic networks as it had, earlier in 2006, led to the liberalisation of Safaricom, Kenya's main telecom provider. This is important because the massive diaspora wants to know what is happening at home, and this they have done through social media and blogs. Kenya has one of the largest diasporas in the world, with 2.6 million nationals living abroad. This is where social media became important for the political environment of the country.

How does that impact the role of social media? When television and media were censored, the only place where people could get information on the developing crisis was blogs, Facebook and other social media platforms. Until recently, social media was known to be for young people but the reality in East Africa is that it is becoming a political space. Conversations people are unable to have offline are being had online. People are having debates about what justice looks like, for women, persons with disability, inclusive elections and public accountability. Because of censorship in traditional media, social media has become a substitute for some of these conversations; however, it is not a perfect substitute. There are the good, bad and ugly sides of social media.

The good side: There are more calls for public accountability in the online space. In 2017, Kenyans went online and demanded that the Independent Review Commission tell the truth about what was happening in the elections. Chase Bank, a popular mid-sized bank for small and medium enterprises, came under scrutiny online where a Twitter user asked for reassurance from the bank. Less than two weeks later, the bank was under receivership and people lost all their money. How does this happen? Did social media cause the bank to collapse? No. Someone had leaked information on the problems within the internal structure of the bank which had then triggered this reaction.

In a context where people are accustomed to public institutions not responding to criticism, where people's opinions matter five years during the voting period when politicians are seeking votes. What does it mean to have a space where you can invite public officials to join in the conversation? There are many opportunities for accountability than ever before. The #Justice4hadija campaign exposed a gap in health service provision and women's rights. A young woman in rural Kenya had been stabbed in the head by her husband, and she was found in hospital two days later with a knife in her head. The picture circulated online and, suddenly, people were not only demanding she be airlifted to Nairobi for treatment, but they were also asking why there had been no doctors in the hospital for the two days. They demanded justice for her and, as a result, her abuser was tried in court. Space has been created for accountability for women's rights and minority groups.

Social media has debunked the narrative that Africa is 'tribal', that we are unable to measure ourselves, our needs and political aspirations and expressing them in ways that are not tied to our ethnic identities. It shows that there are other things that shape the way Africans think about politics, be it one's identity as a woman, a young person, or an urban person. None of us is just one thing. We are multiplicities of identities that intersect and overlap. This has created room for people to think differently about their political identities. Political candidates and young people are able to mobilise support from different ethnic backgrounds, because of what they represent, not because of who they are. Boniface Mwangi, a young candidate who ran for political office in 2017, used social media to encourage people not to focus on him but, instead, on his message. He made a significant impact on the way people thought about politics in Kenya. He was the first Kenyan candidate to entirely crowdfund his campaign that raised USD 20,000. Today, so many young women and men use social media politically and in making their political stands known.

The bad side: In many ways, social media has enabled new forms of violence to exist in public life, especially gendered, structural and situational violence. Women are normally victims of cyberbullying, doxing (taking someone's personal information online with the intent of encouraging people to harm them) and harassment. These new forms of violence are designed to intimidate women and minorities out of the public space. A case in point is what happens to Kenyan Somalis online owing to their history of marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination.

There is a level of opacity and a lack of transparency in how political conversations are being created, shaped and translated. Governments in Africa are spending huge amounts of money to influence the conversations online, through the systemic use of bots. In Kenya, there is a presidential strategic communications unit whose job is to maintain the president's stature online. As conversations on social media become more potent, the system becomes more vested in understanding, influencing and shaping these conversations. This results in the disproportionate use of hashtags designed to hide what people are saying online, and smokescreens to distract the conversation. This is a form of manipulation.

The ugly side: Surveillance and how power is using the information that we generate and recreate online should affect everyone. Through posting personal pictures, people can build their profile. While people do this to keep in touch with their friends, the information we put on social media is being harvested by governments to build platforms that help them understand behaviour online. Some of this information is used to intimidate activists, opposition candidates and critics. Private corporations are doing this as well. As we use social media for engagement and political conversations, there are private corporations which may be interested in this data as well. A clear example is an app which views the backdoor of Facebook to gain information about protests in Louisiana. As a result, five of the best-known leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement have

been killed in the last three years. This app was eventually removed from Facebook's API because the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) fought against it. It was a violation of civil liberties. What is the equivalent of the American Civil Liberties Union in Africa? Who is going to sue on our behalf when our information is used the same way?

This has led to the loss of autonomy and agency of citizens' information. Who do we sue when the country falls apart? When a foreign company promotes content on local social media boosting hate and confusion, who do the citizens turn to for redress? Where is the accountability in this context?

As a tech realist, Nanjala Nyabola opined that social media has played a tremendous role in facilitating conversations that otherwise would never have happened in the Kenyan context. For example, the screening of the LGBT film, Rafiki, was at first banned in Kenya, only to be unbanned owing to online pressure. By the end of the first week, the film was ranked the second highest grossing film of all time in Kenya. This is because of the conversations people were having online. This was also visible in the recent Supreme Court decision not to overturn the colonial law on homosexuality. Social media has allowed the expression of the full identity of Kenyans. It has provided a safe space for people to be who they want to be. While there are no immediate solutions to the negative impact of social media, solutions can be shaped by citizens who shape the outcomes and conversations.

'There are no quick answers, history is a process, and social change is a process not event. I hope that by putting these questions on the table I have given you a new way of thinking about the potency and power of these spaces and the power of your work and participation over them. Technology does not do anything, we do. Human beings do all these things and these spaces are moulded by us or destroyed by us. We must shape the tone and outcome of the social media space.'

Main Panel Discussion: Perspectives for Digital Democracy in Uganda and Beyond

The main panel discussed the perspectives for digital democracy in Uganda and East Africa, highlighting the opportunities and pitfalls social media presents and exploring the constraints political parties and the general public face in online engagement. Host Norah Owaraga contextualised the digital reality in Uganda by quoting an article from The Guardian: 'The problem is out in rural areas, people feel far from where decisions are made.' This shaped the conversation on the political usage of the internet in Uganda and how people connect with political parties. While there is active engagement online, the digital environment in Uganda remains harsh with the introduction of the social media tax, which has substantially reduced online engagement.

The panel was comprised of respected and reputable digital experts and activists from the region and beyond. Nanjala Nyabola, an author and political analyst, Kerstin Welter, freelance journalist, Awel Uwihanganye from the Government Citizen Interaction Centre, Michael Katagaya from the Evidence and Methods Lab and Joel Ssenyonyi, the spokesperson of the People Power movement.

The paradigm of the Fourth Industrial Revolution presents the idea that millions of people are connected by mobile gadgets and, therefore, have access to a lot of knowledge and information. These gadgets have the capacity to store massive amounts of data and process it at high speeds. To what degree can online presence be translated into meaningful offline action? Of the 29 registered political parties in Uganda, three are defunct and 26 are active. The Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) has the largest Facebook following, with 111,000 followers. The rest of the political parties have a dismal following, which does not reflect the high population of Uganda. Why are there so few people interacting with political parties online?

Michael Katagaya stressed that people should look at Uganda's internet activity from global and continental perspectives. In Africa, only 20 per cent of the population is online, and of the 40 million people in Uganda, only 16 per cent are online. This population cannot be used to judge how active these political parties are because politicians are still using analogue methods of mobilisation. Social media gives the idea that democracy is getting better and people are using it to engage more, but it is important to consider what is being talked about. Social media shouldn't be used to tell how influential political parties are. However, political parties should not underrate the opportunity it presents. Awel Uwihanganye concurred, saying that community mobilisation for the National Resistance Movement (NRM) political party is still analogue with physical community engagements. For a very long time, many Ugandans have used social media for personal sharing but this trend is beginning to change, said Joel Ssenyonyi. People are now beginning to engage politically. The conversation is moving away from personal and unserious conversations to more serious topics like social justice, democracy and governance.

Norah Owaraga observed that the trend of social media shows that personalities are more popular than the parties they represent. Does this present an issue where people follow political figures rather than the political parties and their ideologies?

For Nanjala Nyabola, political parties were not as active as the government in disseminating political messages using social media. To understand this, there is a need to look at the underlying social and political phenomena. We cannot expect political parties to be active online when most do not survive two election cycles. The current president of Kenya has been in four political parties over the last two years, the opposition leader has been in five over the last 25 years. How can they cultivate an audience for political parties when these parties are transient things for them? Nationalism is another underlying factor in the way social media is used for political parties. Sixty-seven per cent of all the #FreeBobiWine tweets came from Kenya. This shows that active users may not be in the given country and are unable to vote. This affects how online engagement translates into offline action.

In comparing social media engagement on matters of democracy and social justice in Uganda and Germany, Kirsten Werner noted that because the digital revolution is only beginning in Uganda, it is difficult to make this comparison with Germany, whose political figures have, for long, used social media to convey their messages.

Joel Ssenyonyi remarked that while the idea of having a large individual following is good for a political figure, the purpose of raising social issues should be maintained. The nature of politics has created an uneven ground, making political parties resort to other means of organizing. For example, despite the Electoral Commission's ban on early campaigning ahead of the 2021 general election, the NRM has been given funds to hold campaigns, disadvantaging the other political parties. Opposition can rely on social media as they wait for the Electoral Commission to lift the ban.

The general confusion regarding whether or not the president is currently campaigning or conducting a wealth creation tour was addressed by Mr Uwihanganye, who said that it was unfair for the opposition to take this stand. In every democracy, there is the privilege of incumbency and the president is making a national tour to evaluate the progress of the development plans as outlined in Vision 2040, which set a path for growth. His opinion is that the social media tax would be repealed because it did not serve any purpose, even for the ruling party.

In Kenya, the heavy tax on the internet knocked 4 million people off the internet, explained Ms Nyabola. This contradicts the government's efforts to digitalise service delivery. The impact of social media is not just felt in connection with freedom of speech but also with how individuals act with technology. To effectively take advantage of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, people should have access to quick and affordable internet. Kirsten Werner advised that, to effectively participate in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, online activism and politics should be put in touch with offline actions. In Uganda, internet penetration has dropped from 47.4 per cent to 35 per cent and keeps dropping. This means that some people do not have online representation, which necessitates offline engagement.

Mr Katagaya noted that political parties ought to know the environment in which they operate. There is a need to liberate the minds of Ugandans to start thinking positively in terms of online engagement and build confidence to know that they have the power to create the changes they want to see. He assigned the responsibility to educate the masses about digitalisation to political parties, citing the role social media played in the Egypt and Sudan revolutions and the Arab Spring, where young people relied on it to mobilise for change.

The plenary discussion centred on political party fundraising and mobilisation online, freedom of expression, shifting support from political figures to the ideologies in political parties, fake news and the systematic use of bots to distort conversations online. One participant stressed that it is the role of political parties to make social media platforms serious in order to provoke serious discussions.

Another participant observed the trend of fake news coming from reliable sources. Mr Katagaya observed that fake news is not as prominent in Uganda as it is in other parts of the world, but is on the rise. Even mainstream media do not fact check sometimes. It is important for social media actors to curate and package information for easy consumption by the general public.

Since social media is sometimes riddled with insults, derogatory communication and hate speech, Kirsten Werner advised blocking hateful people and promoting a good, positive debate culture.

One participant was curious to know how social media could be used strategically to influence young people to take political action, the same way Cambridge Analytica had done. In response to this, Ms Nyabola said that strategising the way Cambridge Analytica has done stratifies people based on their profiles, which causes individuals to view data based on their profiles. This, in the end, reinforces identity boundaries which cause people to view things differently.

On navigating social media shutdowns, Ms Nyabola noted that in 2016, there were 17 shutdowns on the continent and increased use of VPNs. She urged people to increase offline action when faced with challenges like this. While referring to the people who fought for independence in the absence of the internet, she said that it can be done. She demystified the idea that electoral politics is limited to the serious conversations had online, asserting that politics is about the distribution of power in society and social media is about normalising these conversations. She added that political messaging is different from commercial messaging.

Mr Uwihanganye mentioned the need to mentor the young generation through social media. Social media has led to disruptions in other sectors and this is happening in politics as well. While social media can bring about change, it is important to determine what change we want. He emphasised that while social media has created spaces for freedom of expression, freedom of speech should not include offensive communication.

Mr Ssenyonyi concurred with Ms Welter, encouraging blocking and ignoring hateful people on social media. He noted that people were frustrated by the government and were using social media as an avenue to express their dissatisfaction and anger. In order to target young people on social media, People Power is running an online campaign to encourage people to get their national IDs so they can vote in the next election.

Lightning Talks

This session of the Social Media Conference was hosted by NTV news anchor, Sandra Twinoburyo. The session consisted of ten-minute presentations from six key influencers and experts on journalism and digitalisation.

The nerds are now in control – Ian Ortega, engineer and writer

Nerds are the people that wrote computer programming and came up with all technologies that the world sees now. These are people like Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, and the kind of people who are writing code. Marshall McLuhan was the person to first advance this idea. It is not the content that matters, but rather the medium that is being used to transmit that content. To break it down further: It doesn't matter what message you receive but how you receive and transmit that message.

When you go down through the ages, you find that the first means of communication was speech. As we evolved we developed the capacity to speak, thus developing language, and then we evolved further and developed the art of writing. The biggest change was when the printing press came on the scene. The printing press brought about the idea that ideas can be segmented. This resulted in nationalism and capitalism because, for the first time, ideas could be transmitted across platforms, nationalities and geopolitical locations. The medium is the message. TV and social media configure the message to act in a certain way.

Social media brings people together. Throughout history, it has been that whenever people have come together, there is bound to be friction. In essence, social media brings us close together so that we can clash. It disembodies people instantaneously – it takes away our bodies. It takes away one's identity and makes us all the same. When people's identities are taken away, they resort to violence. Violence is essentially a quest for personal identity. When people have been equalised and they are looking for a way to stand out, they fight, they get outraged, and social media prepares them for that.

Action and reaction are happening at the same time and tolerance is lost. That instantaneous action doesn't give you time to reason or for tolerance. Social media depicts the effects of outrage from extreme views. The extreme view is also a quest for identity because the only way to stand out with social media is to role play, to act out some controversial idea. We are all basically role-playing in the new age, putting on a performance every single day.

He who controls the algorithm controls the message. Basically, whoever controls the algorithm controls the media and controls the content. This is priming us to be echo chambers.

When people don't have an identity, they cannot be heard. So this violence, this outrage, is their way of trying to say 'I do matter. I'm here, can you listen to me?' Oftentimes, we look at the content to try and understand social media. But we have to step back away from social media and look

at the context of social media. What algorithms are running on social media? The medium is the message, the user is the content, algorithms are the new medium, and whoever controls them has already controlled the future.

Nerds, the people who were uncool, are now defining people's options and narratives. These are the people sitting behind the computer, the guy saying this is how Facebook should operate. This is the guy in control of creating a cryptocurrency, to whom everything else doesn't matter.

Tapping the potential: Social media for public service feedback – Joanitah Nsasiirwe, SEMA

SEMA is a data-based organisation that gathers citizen feedback to improve public service delivery. The government officials and public offices actually take this feedback seriously. SEMA has been working with the public service for about a year now and what it has implemented is quite interesting. With respect to absenteeism at work, there have been complaints by people who visit those offices, and, as a result, structures have been improved. People are coming to work more often, as opposed to before when government workers stopped working on Thursdays.

How can we tap into the potential to have social media used in the public service?

SEMA has put up quite a number of tools to help citizens give their feedback to the offices that they get services from. Some of the tools include toll-free lines, WhatsApp lines, active Twitter accounts @talktosema, Facebook and an official website.

'We are following SDG 16 which majorly promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. We all know the trend these days is social media. So, in order to promote this inclusiveness of societies in sustainable development, social media is the way to go. We have to include societies in whatever we do.'

The major problems in service delivery are that citizens are not treated as clients, yet they pay for the services and the government has failed to make their services user-friendly. In order to solve these problems, feedback is made fast and instant in real time. Through social media, the government is able to get this data in real time as opposed to the suggestion boxes of old. For example, through Facebook and Twitter, information that all police forms are free was shared. Citizens now know that they don't have to pay, sometimes as much as 50,000 Uganda shillings, for the forms. However, the information that government offices share with the public needs to be factual and verifiable. It needs to be personalised, purposeful, open and transferable.

How is information disseminated? SEMA engages government officials to let them know that before this information is put out there, the audience needs to be identified. Finding the story in the data is the next step. SEMA advises public offices and any other organisation to be careful with what they post on social media and to make sure that their social media accounts promote efficiency in the government. They work with the government to contain a situation before it becomes public. The benefits that public offices have gained from social media are: service and customer experience have improved; reach and citizen engagement have increased; there is real-time data collection; and public perceptions of government institutions have changed.

The social media rush: Why traditional media isn't obsolete – Canary Mugume, NBS TV and Next Radio

Do traditional media still matter in this era of social media? The biggest source of information in Uganda is radio. In the rural areas of the country, radio is the main source of information. Social media is crafted in a way that is totally different from traditional media, which makes it difficult to compare the two. Social media has always helped traditional media to disseminate information. A few years ago, the invasion of digital media brought us a challenge. Social media was awash with comments on the lack of creativity in traditional media and questions on whether traditional media would exist much longer. This got scarier when traditional media started making losses. Figures from 2017 show that the Monitor Publications Ltd, which publishes the *Daily Monitor* and *Enyanda* newspapers, suffered a revenue drop of 20 per cent. Africa Broadcasting Limited, the holding company of NTV and Spark TV, registered a 9 per cent slump in revenue while TVs like NBS and NTV remained the most profitable in the business. All this bolstered the narrative that new media is dominating and traditional media is fading. Social media is crafted in such a way that it does not provide gatekeeping for information. While social media has brought with it fake news, traditional media has a line of producers, editors and other people who go through the information to verify facts. It is because of traditional media that we've created the line between fake news and facts.

As much as social media provides space for debate and several layers of interruptive civic engagement, it does not provide context to information, which is the day-to-day job of traditional media. There is no way traditional media is going to fade away. If it ever does, the context of information would fade with it.

During the 2016 election, social media was shut down. Only a small percentage of online users could access social media. Had it not been for traditional media, information flow would have been crippled in the whole country. It is important to understand the people who are relying on social media for information. Why does Bobi Wine have the biggest engagement? As a matter of speculation, it could be because he is the new kid on the block, and he's very good with social media. Perhaps the incident in Arua could have escalated the engagement. But the trend is different for media houses online. Even on social media, the audiences are relying on traditional media through online sources for information. Traditional media is reliant on social media to disseminate information, even when we actually think that social media is the new wave and it's going to replace traditional media. Traditional media is actually social media, and that is why you have all the leading media houses in Uganda having an active presence on social media. There are certain things that social media cannot do, and these are the same things that traditional media is using social media to do. Media houses have created online platforms like WhatsApp or Telegram through which they can disseminate information. They are using online platforms to drive audiences to their news sites. Traditional media is not going anywhere. Traditional media does not mean people visibly viewing TV; it's content is crafted and disseminated by traditional media. Traditional media is still the biggest content producer. A clear demonstration of this is how NBS has incorporated social media into the news at 9 p.m. As a news anchor reads the news, someone at the back cuts and edits short videos, creates audiovisuals and posts them on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

BBC has done the same with Instagram. They have utilised IGTV, the TV for Instagram, to post short stories running for five minutes, to make content more consumable.

Social media versus public opinion: Ideological battlegrounds revisited – Bernard Sabiti, Development Initiatives

Information and communication technology has upended people's lives despite its being only a recent innovation. Facebook is a 15-year-old company. WhatsApp was founded in 2009. YouTube was founded in 2005. When the history of the 21st century is written, it is going to be found that social media is one of the most consequential inventions of the 21st century, way more than TV or radio.

This has caused a whole lot of problems. Social media was designed to make people feel good about themselves. It was a deliberate effort to boost narcissism, and this has created all sorts of problems. It has become a machine that is basically feeding egoistic tendencies, self-regard and self-delusion, sometimes every second, every minute, every hour, and every day. It panders to our fixation with how we are perceived. It has caused this vicious cycle of the need to respond to everything. These days we have experts on everything.

Everybody has been talking about how great social media is and nobody has really talked about the underbelly of social media. In China, internet addiction is so high that kids have to seek therapy. Social media, as a result, has poisoned the political discourse. It has brought about the ideology that the people that don't share your ideas are not just wrong – they are bad too. In universities, especially in the Western world, people protest against some speakers who have been invited to come and speak about things they don't agree with. We are basically creating snowflakes, young people who feel uncomfortable listening to worldviews that they do not subscribe to. This has destroyed free thought and freedom of expression. In political discourse, social media has created a perfect avenue for ideological insults and fights, and the idea that someone whom you do not agree with has to be evil.

Social media has created tribes – the small corners that people retreat to – and, as a result, everything you see is from the person who agrees with you. As a result, it is possible to live a deluded life. You think that a lot of people agree with you because you do not have the willingness to open up and reach out to people who disagree with you.

How can we be civil? When we are having conversations on social media? The information posted on social media should be grounded in evidence, not emotion. It is not important to have an opinion on everything. Civility should be maintained in discussing with people with differing ideologies; insults and name-calling denote insecurity.

Social media needs to be handled carefully because it can be a time bomb. In many cases, when not handled very well, social media can be extremely destructive, especially to civil discourse. As a solution, Sabiiti advised switching the phone off for a day, once in a while, citing that social media is not good for one's mental health.

Open governance and social media – A new alliance? Awel Uwihanganye, Government Citizen Interaction Centre

The Government Citizen Interaction Centre (GCIC) aggregates information from different ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), and communicates it to citizens. The concept of open governance is part of the ongoing evolution of the nature in which governments operate. In this way, governments make information open and ensures that there's a direct linkage between the government, public policy and the public service, and that services are delivered to the citizens.

At GCIC, this is done in different ways. One way is through provision of a toll-free number, 900, on which GCIC receives many calls from citizens. These calls are processed and escalated to different MDAs. Feedback is then given on the issues raided. Social media plays a role in scaling up open governance.

To support the government, GCIC is making sure that all the information that is supposed to be public is made public through digital platforms like websites, photos and social media.

In terms of government presence online, there are some statistics relating to where we stand now. In terms of government ministries, departments, embassies, independent agencies and other ministries, almost every single one of our ministries has a website. And the majority of them have social media and they engage actively on social media. Our major efforts are directed at making sure that the country has an official government portal. We should have a main platform for any information that concerns Uganda.

Social media accounts are very engaged now, in the context of how citizens can utilise social media to keep the government accountable. An example of a way in which citizens, using social media, have forced the government to account is the recent scandal involving the ownership of Uganda Airlines. Ugandans are now using social media to force narrative change. This has also been witnessed with critical social services like water, electricity and revenue collection and how responsive they are on social media. The role of GCIC is to catalyse Ugandans' demand for service delivery, and particularly making sure that we can utilise digital platforms and social media.
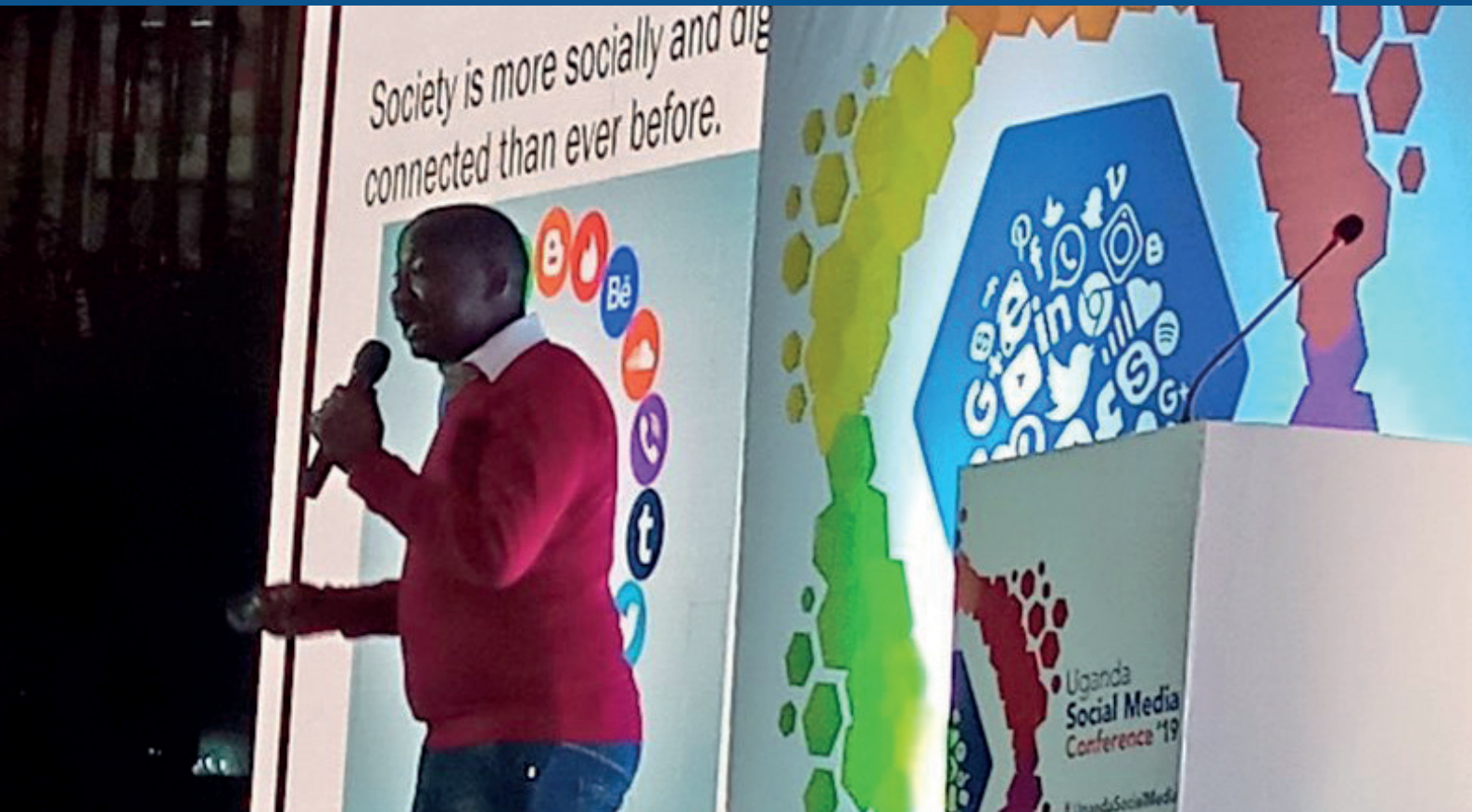
Harnessing the potential of social media for investigative journalism – Solomon Sserwanja, NBS TV

Solomon Sserwanja explored the critical role social media plays in investigative journalism. Referencing stealing from the sick, a widely viewed investigative story he had reported, he examined the importance of social media in providing links and feedback, and spreading a message to provoke action. He also cautioned against fake news and upheld traditional media for its in-depth and verifiable reporting. The world is more socially connected right now; a video shared in Uganda can actually reach people in the US or people in China in just a second. Across different social media platforms and also around the country, people are responding to the story and there have been all sorts of feedback.

Social media acts as a source of contact for people to interview and creates opportunities for collaboration. A classic example is the Panama Papers, a collaboration between over 400 journalists, including Uganda's Tabu Mutagyira. He advised people to use social media not only for entertainment but also for branding and networking. It is important to create a social media profile that maintains one's identity.

Social media presents a platform on which citizen journalists meet with professional journalists. It provides the opportunity for a user to use their phone to create a story which a journalist could pick up on and investigate further. Owing to influence peddling in the newsrooms, some stories are blocked, but social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter provide an alternative outlet for these stories. Social media also acts as a source of secure communication with sources through platforms such as Telegram and Viber, which have end-to-end encryption and cannot be hacked.

Following his exposé on the injustices in the health sector, one of the pharmacists implicated took their life. Sserwanja concluded by expressing sympathy for the young man who committed suicide.

Round-table Talk: Social media, Digital Etiquette and the Changing Nature of Human Interactions

Josephine Karungi of NTV kicked off the discussion by asking the discussants what they understood by the term 'social media'. David Girling noted that social media is an interactive, two-way form of communication meant to be social in nature. Martin Baluku from Makerere University, on the other hand, explained that the 'social' in social media has always to be emphasised while defining social media. According to him, social media is a medium of connecting with other people. Often, people think that when a person is on social media, they are largely engaging with their gadgets while disengaging from other people. Social media should be seen in a positive way—as a channel for people to engage more with each other, especially in the current environment in which people operate and spend a lot of time away from family and friends. However, it can be a tool of disengagement as people may be so drawn into social media that they forget to interact and engage with people around them.

Has social media, therefore, revolutionised the way people interact with each other?

David Girling affirmed that social media has changed human interactions. For instance, it has helped professors at different universities to interact with each other and offered many opportunities. Martin Baluku noted that the world is now in the midst of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which is information-driven. We should be able to embrace this era of information and how we get the information.

'The way we work and live is that we can no longer be in the same place at the same time. But we can now interact face to face and chat,' he said.

With the advent of social media, voice calls are also becoming more expensive and, therefore, platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook offer easier ways for people to chat and interact. It also opens up opportunities for work and other activities. For example, students at Makerere University no longer have to travel to the university to do coursework with their colleagues because all the reading materials can be found online. Therefore, in this sense social media is making interaction much easier, much quicker and interactive. Social media has also made it easier for people to express themselves. There are people, for example, who shy away from addressing issues publicly but find doing it is easier to do so online. There are lots of people who are engaged in activism but cannot go to the streets to protest but will find it easy to go to their Facebook pages and advocate a given cause.

Mr Baluku noted that in using social media, though, context is crucial. Freedom of speech, although a constitutional right, is never respected or protected the way it should be. Social media can give people the platform to express themselves on issues they should have been talking about openly but which they keep away from because of the consequences of doing that. There are also socio-cultural considerations involved that may lead people to resort to using social media to put across a message. David Girling, on the other hand, said that for some people, the advent of social media hasn't really made any difference.

Should etiquette govern social media spaces be developed?

Mr Baluku opined that rules and guidelines to govern the social media space would be very difficult to implement because no one can have full control over how people use the platforms. Even with the laws and policies in place, there is selective implementation of them as some people have been apprehended for their use of these platforms. People have the responsibility to regulate themselves in the way they use social media. Further, people should also take note of how their information will be perceived by their audiences or followers.

A lively discussion ensued, where participants engaged the discussants on social media etiquette.

One participant questioned the rationale for self-regulation on social media. David Girling responded that education is crucial in helping people understand the consequences of what will happen to them if, for instance, they post content including hate speech. In the UK, for example, when children transition to high school, their first day of school is often dedicated to teaching them about digital safety and cyberbullying. Martin Baluku added that the government needs to be able to keep an eye on cyberbullying and apprehend the culprits.

Another participant argued that because social media platforms such as Facebook are run by algorithms, everything is tailored to capture a user's attention and sell that information to advertisers. The onus is upon users of the social media platforms to change the way in which they interact with each other. People with substantial followings can be helpful in changing how people act online.

According to another participant, technology is evolving and, therefore, interactions are also changing. This means that the current social media platforms in use right now may not necessarily be the same platforms we may use in the next 10 – 20 years. Because the current social media platforms are curated and developed outside Africa, the continent needs to create its own social media platforms.

With regard to regulation, in view of the changing or evolving social media space, a participant noted that, who mentioned that he is a legal expert, one of the issues being discussed right now within the legal sector is how to regulate human interaction in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. He said some of the people that users interact with are often bots. Lawyers are currently grappling with issues such as: 'If a person gets abused by bots, who can they sue? The bots? The owner of the account?'

In connection with journalists using social media to further personal causes independent of their media houses, one participant argued that a person is first a citizen before they are journalists and, therefore, they can excuse themselves from covering issues that might involve conflict of interest. Martin Baluku explained that journalists often wield a lot of influence and, therefore, whatever they do online and offline is being watched. People often do not separate personal and professional opinions. To further support this argument, David Girling gave the example of a BBC broadcaster who was recently fired from his job after he posted a tweet that was said to be racist. He added that there is need for organisations, , including media houses, to impose to regulations.

Another participant who argued in favour of self-regulation for social media stated that without regulation, there would be chaos. For example, while offline, people can have protection for whistleblowers, with the internet, such protection takes much longer to be effected because the internet is very fluid. If we have regulations that cut across and are applicable to everyone and in every situation, then everyone will fall in line.

In conclusion, Mr Baluku said that the public needs to understand that social media represents an advancement of social connectors and networking with each other and, overall, people must embrace it. When it comes to regulation, it is complex because there are a lot of issues involved. Key issues that should be taken into account, though, are: What is the responsibility of the individual who is using social media? What are the responsibilities of the government and the proprietors of the social media platforms? All the parties need to play their roles.

Round-table talk: The Power of Bloggers and Influencers – Professional and Ethical Implications

Mildred Tuhaise, news anchor with NBS TV, moderated an interesting discussion on the power the bloggers and influencers have, coupled with the ethics that apply to the creative world. On the panel was Prudence Nyamishana, a reputable blogger, Bernard Olupot, a writer and a creative, and Fred Kakoza, a lecturer and researcher from Makerere University. The discussants shared their insights on building a social media following.

Fred Kakoza pointed out that posting and expressing oneself online comes with a lot of responsibility. He further highlighted the tendency of people to have a dual personality, adding that people cannot hide from the fact that social media is a true reflection of a person's thoughts.

On building a social media following, Prudence Nyamishana said that when she set out to blog, she wasn't out to look for followers but an audience that could relate to what she had to share. She encouraged bloggers to adopt the rotary four-way test: 'Is it the Truth, is it fair to all concerned, will it build Goodwill and better friendships, and Will it be beneficial to all concerned?' Bernard Olupot pointed out the need for people to selectively follow and engage with people online. We have the ability to block out the negative content, through the blocking option. 'There's a lot of good on the internet and it's important to throw light on that,' he said.

Ethical consideration of social media

According to a recent survey in Europe, influencers lose credibility when they associate themselves with brands. While no studies have been done in the Ugandan context, Fred Kakoza advised influencers to separate their personal accounts from promotional accounts. Prudence Nyamishana said that she decided to focus on writing human rights-related stories and it is through this that she has been able to consult with so many international organisations. Further, she noted that talent and skill are priceless and told bloggers that those blogging with the intention of making money would be very disappointed. Instead, blogging should be purposeful and all bloggers should set standards for themselves and have a niche. There are avenues that new bloggers can harness, such as contributing to international media such as The Guardian. Mildred Tuhaise shared a personal example of the importance of maintaining a standard on social media, adding that on some occasions, her Twitter handle had earned her more money than even her pay cheque. She urged bloggers to remember that their audiences understand and can discern information that is authentic from the social media noise. As for Bernard Olupot, engaging brands on his terms as a storyteller has helped him maintain his standards while delivering quality output.

Gatekeeping for bloggers on social media

Mr Olupot said he did not worry about gatekeeping, adding that he believed in natural selection in that if somebody is good, they will always be sought after. Fred Kakoza said it was an individual's responsibility to learn best practices on social media. Just as it's easy to post fake news on social media, people should also find it easy to use the same platform to immediately correct their mistakes once they err. According to Ms Nyamishana, blogging is an alternative space where people have to build credibility, trust and consistency. She pointed out the need for bloggers to check their grammar by making use of apps such as Grammarly. She advised that careful thought should be given to picking an editor, suggesting peer editing as an option. The imposter syndrome (self-doubt), especially amongst the women, is common so it's important that bloggers do not let it get the better of their creative side.

The plenary session brought out a lot of issues such as account hacking, content development, content migration, platforms for blogging, threats and intimidation on social media and mental health in dealing with the criticism and ridicule that comes with advocacy. The panellists unanimously agreed that account passwords need to be changed as often as possible, most especially if an account holds a lot of content. Options for creating a strong password were also shared, such as making use of the Google password manager, two-way authentication and backing up contacts on a Gmail account. Fred Kakoza noted that online presence should be protected with the same zeal people protect themselves physically. On content development and migration, Bernard advised that official content should always be kept in official accounts. There will always be an audience for the content. If it's good, it will attract a following. Ms Nyamishana stressed the importance of letting an audience grow organically as opposed to attracting many followers through boosting (paying for more visibility on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). Platforms for blogging were shared, such as WordPress, Medium, BlogSpot, Muwado.com, Facebook and Twitter.

Regarding how to overcome threats, intimidation and creating a buffer, Ms Nyamishana pointed out the blocking option everyone has but also advised that it's wise to take time off social media to breathe and self-reflect. On his part, Mr Olupot noted that it's in everyone's best interest to abide by the law, and advised bloggers who share sensitive information to have a lawyer's number on speed dial. He advised the participants to tell their stories, no matter the size of the audience. Fred Kakoza added that bloggers should make use of the platforms they currently have. Ms Nyamishana strongly encouraged advised bloggers to keep away from trying to please people and write with conviction.

Mildred Tuhaise concluded with words of encouragement to the bloggers and influencers: Be patient and let your following grow organically. The trolls will always be there. Choose to respond to those you think are worth your time and ignore the rest. Most importantly, there is an opportunity to make money through social media.

Round-table Talk: Stigma, Blame and #MeToo in Uganda – A Twisted Narrative?

In his opening remarks, Raymond Mujuni, the moderator of this session, informed the participants that this conversation would be sensitive and asked for it to be treated with sensitivity. In providing a brief background of the #MeToo movement, Patricia Twasiima, a feminist lawyer with Chapter Four Uganda, said that to her, it meant 'I as well'. The #MeToo movement began when women began to share their stories of sexual harassment, using one hashtag to amplify the stories and highlight the problem as one that affects all women. It began in the U.S. and picked up momentum with the Harvey Weinstein scandal, and has now trickled down to Uganda. She clarified that women in Uganda had been sharing their stories even before the movement, but the global movement gave them a chance to share their stories of sexual harassment on a larger platform.

Raymond Mujuni invited Samantha Mwesigye, a lawyer with the Ministry of Justice who had shared her experience of sexual harassment at the workplace, to share her story and the deatils of the allegations. She clarified that she had not broken her story on social media and went on to narrate her experience.

On 11 June 2018, after she had enough, she wrote an email to her abuser, Mr Christopher Gashirabake, Deputy Solicitor General, chronicling his behaviour towards her. The main reason she chose to tell her story was that on 20 September, Mr Gashirabake had summoned her for a departmental meeting whose sole purpose was to ridicule, intimidate and harass her. Prior to working as the Deputy Solicitor General, Mr Gashirabake had been the Director of Legal Advisory Services, a department in which she has served since 2005. Her ordeal began in 2005 during her clerkship at the Ministry of Justice where he was her supervisor. This ordeal started with offers of lunch or coffee, which she ignored. Upon finishing law school, she was appointed State Attorney in the Ministry of Justice.

On why she went back to a place where she was purportedly being harassed, Mwesigye said that because of women's socialisation, this was not surprising behaviour. On the day she sent the email, he had propositioned her, asking that she go to a lodge with him. To report this harassment, she approached someone close to the minister for help, who asked for money since he couldn't get rewarded with sex. In her quest for justice, Mwesigye said she has suffered harassment and abuse on social media. She expressed shock regarding the victim blaming by people in the legal profession. This was a discussion that needed to be on the table to bring about more awareness of sexual harassment. 'Growing up, I believed that stigma was only in relation to disease, but now I know that it relates to things we cannot talk about.'

She highlighted the challenges of growing up knowing that a woman's place in society is with a man. On the day the story broke, a man approached her and told her that beautiful women are meant to be admired. Even her mother asked her to apologise to Mr Gashirabake because he had done nothing wrong to her. However, she stood her ground, telling her mother that norms had changed with time. She said that she reported him because he abused his role as a supervisor, making it difficult for her to enjoy her role and work effectively.

Society understands that women suffer sexual harassment daily, and that is why policies have been formulated to this effect. This was not the case of a relationship going wrong. Even if it had been one, it would be one of negated consent since he was her supervisor. Mwesigye noted that the story came out before he was shortlisted for the role of Justice of the Court of Appeal. After approaching local media without success, she sought out the BBC, which ran the story,

with NBS following up. Her purpose for sharing her experience was to start a dialogue on sexual harassment at the workplace. However, the narrative that she benefited from this experience burnt her out and drove her off social media. This issue has affected her work, too. The refusal by the Ministry of Justice to address the issue had driven her out of her workplace, from which she had kept away for seven months. Having exhausted all possible legal remedies in Uganda, Mwesigye has since approached the United Nations and the World Bank in the U.S. for assistance.

With regard to why stigma and blame persist in Ugandan society, Patricia Twasiima said that women are not considered as full humans but 'works of art' to be admired, touched and have their spaces invaded. She referenced media's branding of Member of Parliament, Sylvia Rwabogo's harassment, which was trivialised as love messages from a love-stricken boy, notwithstanding that it had caused her to be in fear of her life. She found it most disappointing that the Ministry of Justice, which should be promoting justice for all, refused to investigate the issue. These institutions are made up of people who are part of society, who think it's okay to harass a woman, and it would be a tragedy to have a person like Gashirabake sitting on the bench. This is a pivotal moment for the #MeToo movement in Uganda. Stigma and blame are something that women always suffer and what social media does is to amplify the stigma. #MeToo makes it hard for people to ignore the stories, and this makes it very important. The gaze makes it hard for an abuser to navigate his spaces in peace because wherever he goes, women will know him as an abuser, and this helps women to survive.

#MeToo and sexual harassment in institutions of learning

As a result of the #MeToo movement, university students now have more courage and have been able to talk about their experiences because they know that someone will listen, said Dr Florence Ebila from Makerere University. She noted that patriarchy is deeply ingrained in Ugandan society and it has been socialised for men to make the first move, which has normalised catcalling. Beyond the laws, there is a need to look at how many people are conscious enough to point out things that are wrong. Both men and women need to be sensitised to stop unwanted attention, which is harassment. Men are harassed as well but they keep quiet because of societal constructs of what a man should be.

Dr Ebila construed victim blaming as a method of preventing accountability. She questioned the narrative of asking women to be vigilant, saying that women should not be expected to keep running away from 'harmful' situations.

According to a recent report by Sylvia Tamale, Makerere University has a very toxic environment for female students. Dr Ebila said that to address this problem, these conversations should be held so as to sensitise the students and make them aware of the Sexual Harassment Policy. To this end, students from the School of Women and Gender Studies hold seminars to address these kinds of issues.

In connection with involving men in the fight against sexual harassment, Mwesigye said she had received the greatest support and encouragement from men, who have commended her for what she is doing for them and their children. In agreement, Dr Ebila said that when men speak on sexual harassment, this qualifies it as a social issue and less of a women's issue. Twasiima observed that the reception is always different when a man speaks out on pertinent issues such as violence against women.

The plenary discussion centred on sexual harassment in universities, women's exclusion as a result of abuse, awareness of sexual harassment and the role of men in advancing the #MeToo movement.

One participant emphasised that victims of sexual harassment or assault do not owe anyone a story. They should be allowed to change their minds about telling their stories publicly. Men don't have to say much for society to believe them, and that's why they can easily speak for the movement. It is important to address the power dynamic. If a woman shares a story of rape, there will be victim blaming, but if a man spoke about it, he would be applauded. The only time these issues are taken seriously is when reputations are at stake. Social media presents an opportunity to have these conversations as it is known that the systems don't work. It is important to create safe spaces for the victims to help them to feel supported.

Ms Twasiima stressed that harassment is relative and can be defined differently by people and to understand it, people must listen. She observed that men continually protect the abusers they know, and called on men to stop insisting on their innocence and blaming women for sexual harassment. Until society shuns/punishes men who are abusers, there will not be any justice for women, because the men know that society is for them. Women who speak out against sexual harassment do not stand to gain anything until the system is fixed. Men need to do better. They need to realise that this is not about them; otherwise, they will create more issues. Mwesigye stressed that she was facing dire consequences for speaking out. Most importantly, she has been prevented from practising her vocation, from doing her work. It is only a moral duty for men to join the movement, she said. Dr Ebila said that sexual harassment has to do with power; everyone who engages in it knows what they are doing. She commended the young feminists for calling out these seemingly powerful men, and that even though there will be a backlash, it will be overcome. She concluded by saying that the students harassed at Makerere University could approach the Gender Mainstreaming Programme or Dr Sylvia Tamale for help and redress. Twasiima, too, urged women to reach out to her for support and assistance, saying she is a walking support system.

Campfire Chats: Free Interaction around the Digital Fireplace

Stimulating youth political engagement – Social media as a tool

Chris Okidi hosted this unstructured session where participants were called upon to express their thoughts, opinions and concerns.

On whether social media has played a role in stimulating youth political engagements, Gaddafi Nassur, chairperson of the NRM Youth League, said both yes and no. About 20 per cent of the population of Uganda is on social media but how many of them are active? To actively participate is not the same as being a member of the platform. A certain percentage of young people are active on social media for their own personal reasons. Since his constituency is rural with not even 5 per cent of the population on social media, he was more interested in person-to-person engagement as opposed to social media. In his opinion, social media has been overrated.

Herbert, a master's student of Communication and Journalism, corrected the earlier mentioned statistics. According to a stat counter, there are 800 million active users of Facebook globally. In Uganda, 62 per cent of the population is on Facebook and 13.7 per cent on Twitter. Herbert urged Gadaffi Nasur to understand the power that social media has and its structure so as not to conclude that it is overrated. Conversations held online trickle down to real people.

Geoffrey, a youth leader in Rubaga division, shared his testimony on using social media. Between November and December 2017, he started a campaign to raise money for relief items for refugees. They raised items worth 120 million shillings from Facebook and WhatsApp and, currently, they are running a campaign to construct a house for a lady in Kawempe and he has personally so far raised 3 million shillings from Facebook. He added that most of the people he met at the conference had welcomed him very warmly because of personalising his social media engagement

on all platforms. He urged everyone, including youth and political leaders in different capacities, not to underrate social media.

Another participant, Kennedy, strongly felt that the impact of social media on politics should not be dismissed. By observing the social media following, we can determine a politician's popularity. However, while a leader might do well in gaining a big social media following, the reality of offline political organizing might be different.

Erina, a representative of The Alliance, submitted that social media is a space which has not been interfered with by the government and so, as the opposition, they can easily reach out to people they may never meet in person. She added that they have had to properly brand themselves and create a conversation and perception without fear of tear gas and insecurity. She, however, pointed out a challenge arising from the fallacy that, for example, having 20,000 followers means that one is popular and yet those numbers can't be translated into real-life popularity since the same person cannot have close to 1,000 people attending their political rally. She hoped there could be a way to bridge that gap, moving forward.

Another participant questioned whether young people were constructively engaging on social media through the content they post. We have been looking at how the voices of youth are being brought out while they participate in political processes. Quite often, there are discussion shapers on social platforms where youth follow a political ideology in which they don't bring out their actual views as young people. He gave an example of the People Power fanatics who take their leader's views as gospel truth, and if anyone disagrees with him, they are abused instead of engaging in a civil discussion. It, therefore, happens that the youth are doing a lot of following and not putting their voices out much.

Edna from the Faraja Africa Foundation expressed the view that the issue they have with the youth today, especially on Twitter, is that, sadly, they are more attracted to content that trashes people, the president and other political figures, and do not pay much attention to actual facts. She added that the 'influencers', who even have an authentic following, are the ones that largely post nonsense that young people enjoy, yet they are public figures. As an organisation that posts constructive tweets to do with youth and governance, they struggle with getting young people to be interested in this information because they can't jump on unrelated and vain trending hashtags just to get their work to be seen. Young people are interested in trending information. Before doing their research, they will willingly trend a hashtag with little or no information on the subject because social media has created a fallacy that if you have to make it on those platforms, you must act a certain way. That aside, the impact of social media must not be downplayed because of both the power of visibility and that of true content. We have been able to get to many truths because someone started a conversation on social media. A case in point is the story about 'stealing from the sick' which was a conversation on Twitter started by the anti-corruption coalition caravan done with Action Aid, which was followed up by NBS TV. However, we need to consider the after-effects of putting real content out there, because one of the people caught up in the investigation reportedly committed suicide. So, is having real content therefore beneficial or not?

Collin Muhumuza from the East African Business Week said that the challenge with the 'nonsense posting' that everyone is talking about is that what the internet calls for is story counts which the influencers do to make sure they stay relevant. If one actually stays consistent with the right information, they will gain and maintain a following. Going forward, even in political strategy we need to be constant with our information; for example, in order to know more about the report on 'stealing from the sick', he stated that he would check with NBS social platforms or the Nile Post. He concluded by urging everyone not to shy away from the truth because the World

Economic Forum says that in 10 years, any business, movement or political party that has no online presence will die.

Elvis Kintu, the substantive assistant to the Lord Mayor, noted that in discussing content, he had noticed that many people are not interested in lengthy messages. On the other hand, a lot of young people are drawn towards short and witty messages and were unbothered about researching factual details of anything. We, therefore, appreciate social media as the trend in communication and sharing news, however, some of these questions need to be answered on whether today's generation of young people will benefit from the details we want them to consume over time. He mentioned that while he is active on social media, he had also observed that one can gain a following by paying a few dollars, and others use ghost accounts to become influential by posting false political messages. These observations caused him to worry about the future of social media and also how young and rising politicians will be running their engagement online when their attempts are only met with social media shutdowns.

Mr Okidi mentioned a few elements to consider in public debates:
- Truth
- Objectivity. Regardless of political affiliation, people are putting content in one basket, which is for our common good
- Common good. The debate should definitely better society at the end of it all.

Ronald Matovu said that, as young people, we quickly jump onto trending hashtags without getting our facts right, yet we want to put out a message from the heart. As youth leaders, if we want to influence a group of followers or voters, we need to simplify the complex facts and devise a very simple mode of communication, sometimes even with a bit of humour like one Asan Kasingye on Twitter.

Mr Okidi thought it self-defeating for Ugandans to think there could be an overnight change in the way social media is used. The measure of whether the content is useful or useless is the nature of the consumer, because there are different categories of people on social media looking for different kinds of feed of their own liking, from the jokers and trolls to the factual information seekers. However, political figures and activists must be able to watch what they post, thoroughly fact check, share it for peer review before they publish anything online because a single post or tweet could destroy their image.

Kahill Kuteesa of Kahill Insights explored the history of social media. Social media grew from Hi5, to Tagged, and then to Monitor chat room, until Facebook came, on which we could create content because we had relations with these people from school and other spaces. Twitter's entry got the elite preferring the smaller character posts and everyone knew each other basing on who they were and what they stood for. As everybody else joined Twitter, it appeared that different views, intentions and ideologies suddenly couldn't be controlled. Social media platforms and content, therefore, are not the problem, but rather what all of us are looking to see, hear and read. Finally, we started to carry discussions and later complaints that the government wasn't recognising the work of tech-savvy youth (among other youth initiatives). It is sad to say that the involvement of the government in social media eventually led to shutdowns and social media taxation in the form of Over the Top Tax (OTT). As an influencer, you can influence to just about anyone. Sometimes it's not even about the number of followers you have but about the person right next to you, who believes what you're saying and who eventually shares your word with other people.

Image versus identity – How social media shapes our perceptions of self and others

This session was hosted by Tracy Kababiito, a third-year Mass Communications student at the Uganda Christian University, and Edna Ninsiima. Ms Ninsiima, writer, communications practitioner, traveller and Rotaractor, opened the discussion by stating that image and identity are almost similar things, but the difference is that image is what you present yourself as, while identity is who you inherently are or identify as, whether a philanthropist or a feminist as she is. Is it possible that one can be a different person online, just for the jokes and fun conversation, but yet stand for the 'serious' views in person?

Herbert, who is doing a study on perceptions on social media for his master's thesis, said that what someone says may largely not be the same thing that they mean. It is hard to study perceptions on social media. You need to know what mood they were in while they posted, who they were speaking to, and, many times, even while getting the opinions of people online, their views might easily be affected by offline personal experiences that could be outside your knowledge as the recipient of feedback.

Edna added that it's also possible that people's minds change depending on how much more information they receive. Six months later, one's mind about a political leader, for example, could change owing to new knowledge and conversations. What's difficult is establishing whether this person is being truthful or just a phony, especially opinion leaders who don't have the luxury to skip from one thought to another because they have a huge following. She recommended that people should adopt intellectual honesty, which we don't experience much on social media. In this case, an opinion leader would admit that while they believed a certain narrative earlier on, they have made new discoveries and acquired new knowledge that have since changed their thoughts.

Gaddafi Nassur shared his experience of the kind of image expected of him on social media after he shared a picture of himself drinking a bottle of beer, which caused a stir amongst his followers, considering that he is a leader of the NRM Youth League, a lawyer and former guild president.

Patra Kigula acknowledged that people on social media behave in a politically correct way, in the same way they would while offline: A person who likes their beer during working hours would not put the bottle out on their table but rather pour their beer into a coffee cup.

One participant shared an example of Sheila Gashumba who works as an influencer owing to the image and lifestyle she portrays on social media, which gets many brands interested in contracting her services. She said that a lot of social media users see the large monetary opportunities that come with projecting a certain image online, so they follow the same path to be able to make a living. One should also factor in the high unemployment/underemployment rates in Uganda. People show who they really are on social media. It is important for us to recognise that there's what people really are as opposed to what we perceive them to be, which is what most of us struggle with. We use our perceptions to judge people, which does not work in the real world. Perception includes a narrative either of you or of society.

Oketch thought it was a question of choice. People are on social media for different reasons, including business, personal branding and others. If you're a public figure, you might want to employ someone who is sober 24/7 to work on your social media such that the information shared is consistent and reliable so that you're not compromised.

Another participant argued that the only people that are on social media are the consumers of content because the consumer has the choice to see or hear what they want. He also said that people post out of a wish to express themselves and later keep up particular posts to keep their target audience or amassed audience interested.

Ter Manyang, representative of the South Sudan Network of Civil Society Organisations in Uganda, shared his experience with a campaign he undertook on hate speech in January when he stated that 'most of the beautiful women are not yet married while the ugly women are getting married…' He got a backlash from colleagues and everyone who knew him and even assumed that his account had been hacked. He believes that he will be judged by what he posts on social media because of what he is largely known to stand for.

Marvin said that regarding the likes of Donald Trump, who tweet exactly what they think, people's comments have suggested that he isn't at all presidential compared to our president, who has someone managing his social media accounts and posts strategically and critically. He urged people to think about who they are in society: Are they influencers or individuals that people don't care about? If one considers themselves an influencer, the content they put out may not necessarily represent exactly what is personal to them, but it would mostly be for the sake of whoever is following them and learning from them. On the other hand, a regular individual online may do as they please online as and when they feel like.

Regarding whether young people in business must keep their businesses marketable and relevant online by posting controversial messages, as is the current trend with small business owners, Edna Ninsiima advised that one is free to express themselves in whichever way they please. However, they should not behave this way if they are using their company's social media accounts, in which case they must remain objective at all times, even when under pressure from crises.

Shafiq Mwanamugimu, guild president of St. Lawrence University, said that, much as he got into office through leveraging his comedy stints as his real identity, he was advised by his Professor and Vice Chancellor to separate his actual social media accounts as a comedian from that of his guild presidency by opening up new ones that portray him as president. He recognises that, on social media, these are pressures that come with leadership and that he must conform so that he can serve both entities in separate entireties.

With regard to why women share pictures with filters men while never bother about filters, Patra Kigula said that women have been conditioned to expect treatment based on how they look, and as a result they obsess about who their partner will be or who will eventually want them and not about how capable or brilliant they are as a person. It's a narrative that might not be demystified soon.

Closing Remarks

In his closing remarks, Donnas Ojok, Programme Officer at Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, expressed gratitude towards everyone who had participated in the social media conference. He attributed the conference's success to early planning and constant improvement. He applauded the speakers for sharing their nuggets of wisdom and perspectives and the participants who had taken part in the conference. For this year's conference, he said, there had been a deliberate effort to decentralise the selection of the participants, which was why the call for participation had been shared across different social media platforms. He acknowledged the service providers, DVI for the magnificent branding and the visibility, Pixel City for telling the stories on various social media platforms and Media Challenge Initiative, the collaborative partner. He thanked Storyteld and Media Challenge Initiative and all other individuals, such as Zahara who had captured the epic moments from this conference through videos and photos. Lastly, he recognised the KAS team spearheaded by Mathias Kamp, and applauded their dedication to innovation and creativity.

Since the workshop had come to an end, he urged everyone to continue constructively engaging on social media, implementing all that had been shared and creating engaging content.

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XANADU COLLECTION KAMPALA

and the Prospects for Digital Politics in Africa

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