Social Media and Presidential Elections: Indonesia and Kenya in Perspective

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Abstract

Election stakeholders across the world are using social media as part of their electoral tools for political communication. For instance, in Kenya and Indonesia, political parties and presidential candidates have used social media in order to seek support and influence voting behaviour. Indeed, the use of social media have changed the electoral process of Kenya and Indonesia from 2013 and 2014 respectively. Though, both countries have common historical experiences with colonialism; social unrest; corruption; terrorism; economic and political instability. Nevertheless, both countries are significantly different in terms of their diversities in population, religions, cultures, ethnicities, and languages. In spite of the similarities and differences in the use of social media during elections in Indonesia and Kenya, not much attention has been given to the study of social media and the presidential elections in these two countries. Consequently, this paper examines the use of social media in Indonesia and Kenya’s presidential elections. The paper found out that social media has become a dominant contemporary political communication tool among the political actors and the electorate in Indonesia and Kenya. However, the paper discovered that the engagement of the political actors and the electorate on social media is limited especially during their presidential elections. The paper also discovered that fake news is widely shared especially during their presidential elections. The paper recommends that social media users including the political actors and the youths in Indonesia and Kenya should be sensitized on the dangers of using social media to share and spread hate speeches and fake news. The electorate in these countries should also fact-check and verify information on political parties and candidates especially during presidential elections.

Keywords: Election, campaign, fake, social media and voting

Introduction

Elections are held in a wide variety of political systems; however, they assume special significance in liberal democracies (Odofin, 2005). In view of this, election, according to Odofin (2005), is considered the most important singular indicator of the presence of democracy; as such, it is a critical element of modern representative government, closely linked to the growth and development of democratic political order. In other words, election is the founding pillar of any democratic political system. Indeed, in every democratic system, election is considered the best process for the transfer of political power from one government to another. Undeniably, elections provide the electorate the freedom of choice among competing parties, programmes and candidates, the power to hold elected leaders accountable, as well as protection against regime perpetuation and arbitrary rule (Obi & Abutudu, 1999).
Cognizant of the centrality of elections to the sustenance of democracy, political actors engage in different sets of organizational and communication activities in order to attract voters. Indeed, political parties and candidates mostly use mass media and all other means, during election campaigns to stimulate voter turnout and motivate supporters to go to the polls (Semetko, 2010). Often, the conventional mass media may be partisan in the coverage and reportage of political parties and candidates. This is largely because media owners are part of the (political) elites in the country. These elites largely control the means through which information flows in the society. However, this media ownership concentration is detrimental to fostering media pluralism; and effectively limits access to a plurality of information that are essential for citizens to make their informed choices in democratic societies (O'Maley, 2018). The implication of this is that some political parties, candidates and even the electorate could be short-changed during election campaigns.

Some of the unfair activities of the conventional mass media within the electoral process have led the political actors to seek valuable alternative tools like the social media for political communication. The advent of social media provides new opportunities for political actors to engage more with the electorate. Examples of social media platforms are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and so forth. Compared to the conventional mass media, social media are easier to use, cheaper, faster, instantaneous and wider in reach. Political parties and presidential candidates in different countries around the world have used social media in their electoral campaigns in order to seek support and influence voting behaviour. In the same token, they have taken advantage of social media to set the agenda for civic discussions and electoral campaigns because of the unprecedented opportunities presented by virtual space (Penplusbytes, n.d).

American politicians were the first to use social media as channels of electoral campaigns (Williamson, Miller & Fallon, 2010). Barack Obama appeared to have so effectively used social media in the 2008 American presidential election that he was rated the first to have done so in any presidential election in the world (Aaker & Chang, 2010). Using a combination of social media platforms, Obama connected directly with (young) American voters. In doing so, he gained nearly 70 percent of the votes from Americans under the age of 25 (Heblich, 2016). This appears to open the gateway for effective use of social media by other presidential candidates in all democratic countries of the world. This has drawn some researchers in electoral and democratic studies to develop interest in social media and elections. However, a large number of these researches are on advanced democratic countries especially the United States of America. In view of the socio-political environment of these countries, these researches are unable to entirely examine the role of social media in other countries’ electoral systems. Also, attention is not given to comparative perspective of developing countries social media usage within the electoral process. For instance, in Kenya and Indonesia, the adoption of social media changed the political landscape especially their presidential elections from 2013 and 2014 respectively.

Although, both countries have common historical experiences with colonialism; social unrest; corruption; terrorism; economic and political instability. Nevertheless, Kenya and Indonesia are significantly different in terms of their diversities in population, religions, cultures, ethnicities, and languages. In both countries, the various political parties and candidates in the 2013 and 2014 presidential elections, for the first time, used social media as a contemporary political
communication tool, as against their other elections which utilized the conventional mass media, largely because social media were still in the embryonic stage in these countries. The voting public also used the social media to seek and receive information about political parties and candidates during the electioneering period. However, there are issues and challenges to social media usage in their electoral processes. For instance, political parties and candidates may try to support their cause by active manipulation of social media (Metaxas & Mustafaraj, 2012). Indeed, social media have the potential platform to disseminate fake news, hate speech and incitement to violence. This is particularly problematic in contexts (such as Kenya and Indonesia) where political parties and candidates draw on ethnic or religious differences to mobilize support (Cross, 2017).

In spite of the similarities and differences in the use of social media during elections in Kenya and Indonesia, not much attention has been given to the study of social media and the presidential election in these two countries. As such, this paper examines social media and the presidential elections in Kenya and Indonesia. The paper consists of different sections. First, is the introduction which is followed by the conceptual analysis of election. The next section focuses on the concept of social media while the use of social media and presidential elections in Kenya and Indonesia are discussed in the next section. The last section examines the observed comparison of both countries before the conclusion.

**Election: A Conceptual Analysis**

The divergent experiences and backgrounds of scholars have led to different definitions of the term election. Diamond (2002) described elections as the litmus test of a democratic political system. He affirmed the centrality of elections to liberal democracy. Indeed, he pointed out that of the three defining characteristics of a liberal democratic system, two are categorically election-based. These are: meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups for positions of government power; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies; and, civil and political liberties sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition. This implies that elections guarantee political participation and political competition. However, elections do not only allow for political competition, participation and legitimacy, but also permit peaceful change of power (Omotola, 2008). Upholding this position, Saka and Abubakar (2013) declared that election remains the most viable method for the peaceful and orderly transfer of power from one regime to another in a democratic system.

Gwinn and Nortan (1992) described election as the formal process of selecting a person for public office or accepting a political proposition by voting. They further argue that an election is one of the means by which a society may organize itself and make specified formal decisions, adding that where voting is free, it acts simultaneously as a system for making certain decisions regarding the power relations in a society, and as a method for seeking political obedience with a minimum of sacrifice of the individual's freedom. Wojtasik, (2013) submitted that the decision legally made during an election is irrevocable and cannot be changed in any other way than through the next election. He described the key features of elections in democratic systems as: the uncertainty of the electoral outcome, which depends only on the decision of voters; and the possibility of a real alternation of power and formation of a de facto division into those in power and the opposition. He
opined that elections which respect the free and fair principles will serve as a stabilizer for the democratic system, ensuring repeatable mechanisms of recruitment and selection of candidates for elective positions in the political institutions. Wojtasik (2013) highlighted the functions of elections as: delegation of political representation; selection of the political elite; legitimization of those in power; control over authorities; and ensuring political accountability.

Elections are not only a tool of democratic participation but also a fierce contest for positions of leadership, power and access to resources. As such, elections (especially in developing democracies) have a great potential to plunge a country into violent conflict, thereby undermining the processes of stabilization and discrediting democratization (Kuhne, 2010). In other words, elections can exacerbate political, ethnic, regional and religious tensions and spill over into violence, especially if they are not conducted within an appropriate institutional framework (International Peace Institute, 2011). Gibbins, Webb and Eulau (1999), however, posited that elections link citizens to one another, thereby facilitating social and political integration and reinforcing the stability and legitimacy of the political community. Howard (2004), therefore, declared that elections can be both a key point in conflict resolution and a trigger for conflict escalation.

A democratic election would characteristically be competitive, periodic, inclusive, definitive and free and fair (Chukwu, 2007). Election, therefore, is the process regulated by law in which the people choose their leaders to hold constitutionally recognized public offices. Elections create the opportunity for citizens to express their views, hopes and aspirations, discipline their representatives and ultimately determine the destiny of their societies (Afful, 2016). In other words, elections are an essential process in every democratic system. Indeed, the founding pillars of any democratic political system, whether considered fragile or established, remain undoubtedly elections which can simply be taken as the most critical and visible means through which all citizens can peacefully choose or remove their leaders (Anglin, 1998).

The Concept of Social Media

Social media is fairly a new term with an increasing change and expansion. As such, there is no complete acceptable definition of the term among scholars. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 60) defined “social media as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”. “Web 2.0 refers to Internet platforms that allow for interactive participation by users. User Generated Content is the name for all of the ways in which people may use social media” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 60). Ali (2011) described social media as sites that allow users to have an online presence where personal information might be shared and searches can be conducted for other users in order to communicate with those users, sometimes asynchronously and sometimes synchronously. Ali (2011) argued that social media have an intrinsic value for people, especially in developing nations, and complement efforts to integrate information and communication technology (ICT) into communities to which ICT has been socially resisted. In view of this, he stressed that social media foster digital inclusion, participation and democratization.
Cohen (2011) described social media as the platforms that enable the interactive web by engaging users to participate in, comment on and create content as means of communicating with their social graph, other users and the public. He added that social media have the following characteristics: (1) they encompass wide variety of content formats including text, video and photograph; (2) they allow interactions to cross one or more platforms through social sharing, email and feed; (3) they involve different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment or lurk on social media networks; (4) they facilitate enhanced speed and breadth of information dissemination; (5) they provide for one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications; (6) they enable communication to take place in real-time or asynchronously over time; (7) they are amenable to different devices, such as computers, tablets and mobile phones; and (8) they extend engagement by creating real-time online events, extending online interactions offline or augmenting live events online.

Sarafeim (2012, p. 166) viewed social media as a ‘‘communication channel’’. He described social media as ways to transmit or share information with a broad audience. Sarafeim (2012) believes social media are just means of communication and engaging with the people. He argued that social media are used to filter, assess and react to news. He however contends that social media are not about the tools and the channels - the software or the technology - but about what people do with technology, the software, the tools and the channels: sharing pictures and videos, collecting data, connecting with old friends, sharing with new friends. Rose, Saebo, Nyvang and Sanford (2007) agreed that social media are not so much about technology; but a cultural phenomenon, driven by the public’s need for access to information, self-proclamation and collaboration. In a similar vein, Johannessen (2013) declared that social media are a complex socio-technical phenomenon.

There is a relative consensual description of the concept of social media among scholars in the extant literature. First, social media are applications that depend basically on the Internet. They are driven by the advancement in information and communication technology. Second, social media are mediums that enable users to communicate and disseminate information, interact and share knowledge. Therefore, social media are an Internet-based information and communication technology that provides interactive platforms and opportunities for people to freely engage in private and public discourse through the sharing of images, videos, audios and texts. The use of social media, according to Taprial and Kanwar (2012), has enabled people to stay connected with friends/family, find people with similar interests, discuss issues with others, share opinion, and ask and answer questions. Social media tend to be free and are therefore widely accessible across socio-economic classes (Joseph, 2012).

The Republic of Indonesia

Indonesia is a country located in the continent of Asia with over 261 million people which makes it the world’s 4th most populous country and third-largest democracy. Indonesia has no official state religion but it is the world’s most populous Muslim-majority country with more than 80% of its people as Muslim (BBC News, 2019). Indonesia got her independence in 1945. The 1945 Constitution of Indonesia is the foundation of the country’s system of government. It is a unitary sovereign state with a presidential system. The amendments of the constitution in 1999-2002
subjected the presidency to popular election and limited to two five-year terms (Hays, 2015). Presidential elections are held every five years shortly after legislative elections in order to establish which political parties or coalitions are eligible to nominate a presidential candidate (Hays, 2015) but in 2019 the country legislative elections and presidential election were held same day in order to increase voter turnout and reduce election logistics cost.

The 1999 elections were the first democratic national elections since 1955 (Hays, 2015). The first presidential election in Indonesia was conducted in 2004. The 2004 presidential election involved five candidates, the 2009 presidential election had three candidates, the 2014 election produced two presidential candidates while the 2019 presidential election was contested by two candidates. A presidential ticket needs to be approved by a single party or a coalition of parties that has won at least 20 percent of the legislative seats or 25 percent of the popular votes in the legislative election (Johansson, 2016). Elections are set and overseen by the General Commission of Election (KPU).

Frentasia (2012) put forward the report published by International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2010), wherein it was discovered that 51% of Indonesians vote for the same party most of the times, compared to 41% who always vote for different parties. This shows that Indonesian voters’ core and swing divisions are quite even. The report also stated that Indonesians prefer to vote for a candidate directly (77%) rather than to vote for only a party (17%). In making their selections, however, according to the report, the candidate’s personality is still the most important factor (40%), compared to other factors such as candidate’s platform (11%), and party affiliation (5%).

The media in Indonesia played a critical role in the electoral process. However, according to Freedom House (2014), there is an ongoing concern about the ability of political parties, large corporations and powerful individuals to control media content, either indirectly through the threat of lawsuits or directly through ownership, with many major media outlets openly reflecting the political interest of their proprietors. A study conducted in 2011 by nonprofit groups, Hivos Southeast Asia and the Center for Innovation, Policy, and Governance found that nearly all the 12 most prominent media companies had ties to political parties in some respect (Freedom House, 2011). These 12 companies also own the country’s 10 major national television stations and five of the six major newspapers (Freedom House, 2011). In other words, the media coverage of the electoral process in Indonesia is largely influenced by media ownership and the political affiliation of individuals with high stakes in the electoral process. One result of this is that election coverage tends to be one-sided (Economist, 2014).

According to Nugroho and Syarief (2012), the nature of ownership of mass media in Indonesia has threatened citizens’ rights to obtain neutral information. Nugroho and Syarief (2012) argue that politicians use their media as political campaign tools to influence public opinion. Mass media in Indonesia have failed to deliver fairly sufficient political information to citizens (Sunandar, 2013; Ardipandanto, 2014). Freedom House (2015) posited that there were widespread complaints of top-down pressure on the media to report favorably on one candidate and not the other, even going as far as the broadcast of misleading election returns based on dubious “quick counts.” Vaswani (2014) argued that the majority of Indonesian media are deeply biased and are influencing voters rather than
informing them. One implication of this is that mass media in Indonesia have the potential to play a very biased role in the electoral process (Johansson, 2016).

Political actors intending to reach out to potential voters through the media have faced at least two crucial challenges. First, the media practitioners act as intermediaries or even gatekeepers between political actors and the people (Gainous & Wagner, 2014). As such, they, or the newspaper, radio or television outfits they work for have a significant influence on how and what news is presented to the voting public. Second, and as stated above, how the media industry is composed may have a significant impact on what is being reported and how it is presented to the electorate (Johansson, 2016).

Generally, steadily increasing costs of election campaigns in the face of the growing phenomenon of money politics and the limits of mass media have resulted in candidates (and other stakeholders) looking for alternative channels to make their voices heard (Johansson, 2016). In view of this, social media platforms (especially Twitter and Facebook) have been used by candidates, parties, supporters and the electorate. Social media have helped to solve some of these challenges and in effect altered how candidates market themselves (Ahmad & Popa, 2014). Indonesia is one of the top five social media markets in the world. Indeed, Indonesia is the fourth highest Facebook user, behind Brazil, India and the United States (Rakhmat, 2017). Rizal (2019) argued that 150 million people of Indonesia are active internet and social media users with mostly identified as eligible voters (18-34 years old).

The 2014 presidential election featured just two candidates: Prabowo Subianto and Joko ‘Jokowi’ Widodo (the candidates were later to become the two candidates for the 2019 presidential election). The 2014 presidential election, to all intents and purposes, turned social media into an integral part of the democratic and electoral process in Indonesia (Johansson, 2016). For the first-time, social media played such a consequential part in the electoral process (Azali, 2014). Online activity on social media started early in what has been called a social media election (O’Neil, 2014). The candidates and political parties, as well as the political campaign industry, were not only aware of social media’s potential to mobilize popular support; they also had direct experience running social media campaigns during election periods in the recent past (Saraswat, 2016).

In Indonesia, social media played a crucial role in the organization of election rallies and concerts. Indeed, many came to rely more on their social media rather than on official news outlets for the latest political updates (Azali, 2014). Presidential election was characterized by widespread use of social media by both political actors and their supporters. Change in presidential election campaigns triggered more participation and interaction from voters (Prasatya, 2015). Undeniably, social media contributed to the intense, dramatic and, at times, hostile electioneering throughout election period, pitting the two presidential candidates against each other in a contest captured on every available channel (Saraswat, 2016). Azali (2014) posited that social media were used to monitor the collation of ballot papers after voting, thereby facilitating the counting process and making sure that there was no room for manipulation (Azali, 2014). The 2019 presidential election was complex due to the fact that it was conducted same day with the legislative elections. As such, effective communication
through social media became more vital than ever in reaching out the electorate. Indeed, social media was weaponized during the election.

Ramadhiansvah (2017), however, noted that social media in Indonesian electoral process have turned into a double-edged sword. On the one hand, social media managed to accelerate freedom of expression, enabling political discussion to flourish around the election. On the other hand, social media also allowed hateful messages during elections to disperse online, spreading fears among users (Ramadhiansvah, 2017). He cited the survey of the Indonesian Information and Telecommunications Society in 2016 which revealed social media platforms as the central channel of hoax dispersal in Indonesia. This finding, he claimed, reaffirms the powerful role of digital technology in manipulating political dynamics.

Azali (2014) pointed out the massive use of bots and hacking attempts to manipulate social media during election by the political parties and candidates. Rakhmat (2017) noted the growing number of social media abuses and ethical violations in Indonesia. He described ethical violations as a variety of actions, including spreading of false information, defamation and more. He pointed out that hoaxes and fake news in particular have become a massive issue in Indonesia’s electoral process. He argued that the sharing of fake news has inflamed ethnic and political tension among Indonesian social media users. Saraswat (2016) asserted that social media was effectively used during presidential election to foster uncivil conversations, and to produce, distribute, reproduce and redistribute negative and slanderous campaign messages – facilitated strongly by the fact that campaigning through social media were not regulated in Indonesia.

The Republic of Kenya

Kenya is an African country divided into 47 semi-autonomous counties, and with a population of about 48 million. The country became a republic in 1964 having attained independence in 1963 from the United Kingdom. It is a presidential representative democratic republic. Elections in Kenya are conducted by the Independence Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC). From 1969 to 1991, Kenya was a one-party state until domestic protests and international pressure forced then President Moi to end that system (Carotenuto, 2017). The first multi-party election in Kenya was conducted in 1992. However, Kenya’s history of democratic elections goes back to 1957. From 1963 to 2002, the country was ruled by just two presidents (Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi) and a single political party, Kenya African National Union (KANU) (Carotenuto, 2017). The 2002 elections marked an important turning point in Kenya’s democratic evolution, in that, power was transferred peacefully from KANU, which had ruled the country since independence to the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), a coalition of political parties (Murungi, 2011).

Mass media in Kenya play a significant role in electoral processes and dissemination of information, participation in which the local citizen was previously excluded (Odinga, 2013). According to Odinga (2013), it was only after the formal legalization of multiparty politics that the media became a forum for lively political debates. However, he argued that such debates frequently took place in hostile environments for the media practitioners and were often unstructured and unfocused. During elections, the role of the Kenyan media was not limited to covering election campaigns and
informing the citizen: certain groups or editorials clearly took sides with candidates in the race; and some media outlets were directly created by the parties they supported (Odinga, 2013). By this, the media became a political player in every sense of the word (Lafargue, 2009).

Ogola (2017) opined that the Kenyan media have become a prisoner of its history. They remain shackled by the consequences of its role in the country’s 2007 disputed presidential elections. According to Ogola (2017), a section of the media was accused of actively promoting the violence that engulfed the country in the aftermath of the polls, in which at least 1,000 people died and more than 500,000 were displaced. This legacy, according to Ogola (2017), has turned the Kenyan media into a bystander in the political process, especially at election time. In 2013, the media hardly raised any objections to electoral malpractices that led to the disputed presidential election. Instead, media houses promoted “peace” to pre-empt a repeat of the 2007-2008 post-election violence (Ogola, 2017). It was a decision that was supported financially by a number of local and international agencies which spent months training the local media in “peace journalism”. This peace narrative, according to Ogola (2017), has now become normalized in election coverage in the country. The consequence has been the creation of an information vacuum (Ogola, 2017).

In Kenya, new media were first used in 2002 by leading presidential candidates, though it was limited to texting (Mungai, 2010) and to their party websites where they posted their election manifesto (Nyabuga&Mudhai, 2009). As the number of Kenyan Internet users grew, the number of presidential candidates that set up campaign websites increased in every electoral cycle (Okech, 2014). Okech (2014) contended that the invention of social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, among others, is an important highlight in the use of new media, particularly web 2.0 technology in political mobilization. He argued that as the uptake of new media grew, there was a corresponding increase in citizen participation in political activity, as evidenced by the increase in voter turnout in the 2002, 2007 and 2013 Kenya presidential elections. Incidentally, turnout was highest in 2007 and 2013 when Internet and mobile telephony uptake were highest, coupled with the growing popularity of social networking among Kenyans (Okech, 2014).

According to Jones (2014), the emergence of social media in Kenya has increased political participation, especially among the youths who previously did not participate in politics. Oser, Hooghe and Marien (2013) submitted that the emergence of new media led to new forms of political participation. As such, social media through the Internet was embraced in Kenya as a tool for both communication and political participation, thus broadening citizen participation (Oser, Hooghe&Marien 2013). In other words, the adoption of new media technologies changed the media and political landscape in Kenya. According to Mayooyo and Kiplang’At (2012), Kenyan politicians and their various political parties have recognized the importance of social media in building a strong link between themselves and their supporters, influencing public opinion, reaching more potential members and ultimately winning more votes. Martha Karua, a candidate during the 2013 presidential election, was the first Kenyan politician to make extensive use of social media for electioneering (Braun, 2013).

During the election, social media played different roles for different parties. Some parties emphasized the participatory aspects of the new technologies in communicating with voters and
monitoring public opinion, while others focused on the possibility of top-down information dissemination. Social media was identified as a means by which people communicate their thoughts as well as communicate with the political candidates (Odinga 2013). An international Institute for ICT journalism, Penplusbytes (2015), stated that social media were highly instrumental to ensuring that the 2013 presidential election was one of the most transparent elections in the recent political history of Kenya. The Institute added that many Kenyans followed election proceedings keenly and were quick to draw the attention of people on social media to any polling-clerk bias or suspicion of electoral fraud. Social media themselves were thoroughly monitored by the government in collaboration with technological firms to ensure that the platforms were free from any inflammatory postings and incendiary comments that could exacerbate tensions (Penplusbytes, 2015).

In a study conducted by Wasswa (2013), it was noted that the 2013 presidential candidates integrated social media into their campaigns. The platforms were mainly used to share information on campaign activities, debate issues, share photos, videos and links, update their followers, solicit funds, counter propaganda, and update their followers. The study’s findings indicated that Facebook and Twitter are the most common social media platforms among urban youths in Kenya. Findings on the political use of social media indicated that they used the platforms to seek political information, keep up with trending topics, share political videos, photos and links, discuss political issues, and get campaign updates. Thus, the urban youths were actively involved in politics when they were on social media.

The study further revealed that social media had a significant impact on the campaign process. The platforms provided a cheaper means of campaigning for lesser-known presidential candidates. It facilitated the recruitment of volunteers and soliciting of funds which were normally done through party offices and luncheons respectively (Wasswa, 2013). In another study, Jones (2014) discovered that during the 2013 presidential election in Kenya, a small segment of the electorate relied on social media in making their election decisions. The study further established that for the electorate the main reason or benefit of being on social media was to get information, while for the politician it is the presence of a ready audience to share information with (Jones, 2014).

It was observed that during presidential elections in Kenya, discussions on social media were intensified along ethnic dimensions. Social media were being used to whip up sentiments and messages that suggest destructive ethnic feelings and violence in the electoral process. Pflanz (2013) noted that social media hate speech battles appeared to be most toxic between supporters of Uhuru Kenyatta, who are largely from the Kikuyu tribe, and those backing Raila Odinga from the Luo tribe. Pflanz (2013) pointed out that many social media comments featured derogatory metaphors historically used to belittle members of other tribes. It must be noted that Kenya has no ethnic group that constitutes the majority. The Kikuyu, makes up only 20% of the nation's total population (African Studies Centre, n.d). About 97.58% of Kenya's citizens are affiliated with its 32 indigenous groups. However, the five largest ethnic groups (Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kamba and Kalenjin) account for 70% (African Studies Centre, n.d). Sifuna (2014) argued that tribalism is one of Kenya’s preferred subjects on social media because the problem has become so entrenched that it has become almost acceptable.
Eight candidates including independent candidates participated in the 2017 presidential election in Kenya. However, Kenyatta’s Jubilee Party and Odinga’s National Super Alliance (NASA) were the major parties. Jubilee Party won the election, and it was observed that social media were utilized during the election in an unprecedented scale. The election firmly demonstrated the incursion and perhaps even gradual institutionalization of fake news as a factor in modern politics, particularly during elections (Ogola, 2017). There was clandestine messaging of fake news on social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Numerous fake news stories widely circulated on social media as unsubstantiated allegations were posted against both parties (Ogola, 2017). However, according to Hairsine (2017), the government increased its tracking of words on social media and messaging services likely to incite violence around the 2017 presidential election.

Hairsine (2017) further stated that the Kenyan government put up new social media regulations banning political messages in a language deemed offensive, abusive, insulting, misleading, confusing, obscene or profane. The regulations also ban political messaging in languages other than Kiswahili and English, as the hateful messages that fanned the 2007 election violence were often written in local vernacular languages (Hairsine, 2017). Also, Kenya’s police were mandated to arrest anyone spreading hate speech on social media. Actually, two people were charged in the western town of Eldoret over Facebook posts. Also, a student was charged in the capital, Nairobi, over a WhatsApp text. Hairsine (2017), however, stated that human rights activists were worried that the government could use the broad definition of banned content on social media to clamp down on criticism or dissent.

Social Media and Elections: Comparative Perspective in Kenya and Indonesia

Out of the world’s 7.83 billion population, 4.20 billion (53.6%) are active social media users. Meanwhile, active social media users in Indonesia are about 61.8 percent of the population and 20.2 percent in Kenya. The annual digital growth rate in Indonesia is 6.3 percent while in Kenya, it is 25 percent. It is imperative to state that the gap in the percentage of the population that are active on social media in both countries is huge. A lot people had access to internet in Indonesia compared to Kenya. However, Kenya’s annual digital growth is increasing. This has implication for the electoral process. As more people would be engaged on social media in Indonesia than Kenya. Though, more political parties in Kenya participate in the presidential elections than in Indonesia. Participation in presidential elections in Indonesia is based on a party’s strength in previous legislative elections. This is a complete departure from Kenya where political parties contest presidential elections without having to secure seats or a percentage of votes from the legislative elections.

Political parties and candidates in Indonesia and Kenya use social media to canvass for votes and support. However, the engagement of the political actors in these countries is low. The voting public also used the social media to seek and receive information about political parties and candidates during the electioneering period. In these countries, social media have transformed the way in which voters access and receive political information, thereby circumventing the filtering of information previously undertaken by traditional media (Heblich, 2016). The excitement social media generates (in both countries) is based to a large extent on the disillusionment and disappointments of traditional media being overly commercialized and not inclusive (Javuru, 2013). Indeed, social media have
helped to overcome previous scarcity of information in the electoral process (Ojo, 2014, cited in Isaac & Adesola, 2015).

As democracies, social media are used for illegal activities during election campaigns in both Indonesia and Kenya, as such, there serious challenges to the regulatory framework for elections in both countries. Authenticity of information, hate speeches, false stories and fake news have become a problem during elections in both countries. Indeed, social media have been used to convey the hate speeches of candidates and political parties during election campaigns in Indonesia and Kenya; and these sometimes could create unnecessary political tension and violence; and influence voting behaviour. Also, some satirical social media accounts are created as a form of parody to the electoral campaigns of some political parties or candidates. This could lead to the loss of faith from supporters; influence voting behaviour and electoral outcome. In other words, whenever the use of social media for electoral campaigns faced resentment from potential supporters, trust was lost. This became a major drawback, as it was difficult to measure the authenticity of the social media accounts of a political party and presidential candidate (Bugalo, 2013).

In the lead up to the 2019 Indonesia presidential election, the Communication and Information Technology Ministry declared more than seven hundred election-related fake news in Indonesia. In 2017, the presidential election in Kenya was filled with widespread of fake news. Fake news may generate utility for some social media users, but it also imposes private and social costs by making it more difficult for people to infer the true state of the world—for example, by making it more difficult for voters to infer which political party and presidential candidate they prefer (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Following a violence that erupted after the declaration of result for the 2019 presidential election in Indonesia, the government restricted some social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter in order to address the challenge of fake news. In 2018, the Kenya government made a law to jail up to two years or fine ($50,000) anyone for fake news. In all of these, there have been criticism against the actions of both governments. In spite of this, the governments in both countries are not relenting in addressing the issue.

**Conclusion**

The findings in this paper revealed that the use of social media during election campaigns in Indonesia and Kenya have become a dominant contemporary political communication tool. It has enhanced communication, interactions, engagements and mobilization of the people during election campaigns of both countries. However, the challenge of fake news especially during the electioneering period in these countries is worrisome. The implication of this, is that it may distort the decision making of some voters; and negatively shape some political viewpoints which could cause tension, conflict and violence within the electoral space. All of these may undermine the democratic process in these countries. Social media users including the political actors and the youths in Indonesia and Kenya should be sensitized on the dangers of using social media to share and spread hate speeches and fake news. The electorate in these countries should fact-check and verify information on political parties and candidates especially during presidential elections. The political actors should also actively engage more people in order to reach out to more people.

References


