

Membership in Online Groups: A Source of Bridging and Bonding Social Capital for Kenyan Youth

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Abstract

By assessing the connection between an individual's membership to an online group and the reasons that lead and keep them there, this article explores the reasons why the youth in Nairobi, Kenya join online groups; topics discussed in the groups and why group members may stay or leave a group. It employs the Computer-Mediated Communication Theory and Uses and Gratification Theory in assessing the meaning of the responses given by the youth studied. A cross-sectional survey targeting Nairobi youth was conducted in two universities in Nairobi in which 384 questionnaires were administered to the targeted respondents. Four focus group discussions of ten participants were conducted and eight social media experts were interviewed. The study found that 50% of the youth are members of up to three online groups, such as academics, sports, politics, former schools, family and friends. Membership in these online groups provides bridging as well as bonding social capital. The study concluded that online groups are important communities for the youth, and therefore there is need to create awareness on the boundaries of these communities and the interactive activities that happen there, which may have varied impact in the lives of youthful online groups' members.

Keywords: Online Community, Online Group Membership, Online Social Support, Sense of Belonging Online, Avenues of Interaction in Online Groups.

Introduction

Pioneers of online community development and research, Rheingold (1993) and Hiltz (1985), used the term ‘online community’ to connote the intense feelings of camaraderie, empathy and support that they observed among people in the online spaces they studied. Other researchers have attempted to operationalize the term so that it is useful in the analysis, design, and evaluation of community software platforms and management practices (Maloney-Krichmar & Preece, 2017; de Souza & Preece, 2004; Preece, 2000). These researchers focused on the people who come together for a particular purpose, and who are guided by policies (including norms and rules) and are supported by software. Theories of broader Internet use have indicated both entertainment and searching for friendship or romance as motivational forces for joining online groups (Ridings & Gefen, 2006). Analyses by UN Chronicles (2017) suggest that two of the main reasons why the youth go on social media platforms are to network with others and to meet new people, which puts the youth in a unique position to engage with people from diverse backgrounds and countries. The youth use social media for various reasons such as maintaining existing relationships, connecting with friends and relatives overseas, and creating new social relationships. Social media have been credited with building connections among both heterogeneous groups and closely knit homogenous communities. Steinfield, Ellison and Lampe (2008) claim that users of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) primarily use the platforms to connect with people they already know in real life, while Westling (2007) views the group function of SNSs as bringing users into contact with many people who are unknown to them.

Perrin (2015) found that social media usage had experienced explosive growth between 2005 and 2015. As of late 2016, Facebook for example had grown so populous that it was no longer considered just a social network. It had become a de facto political organizer; a major news source; a global video distribution platform; and a marketplace for goods and even jobs (Comstock, 2016). The internet therefore creates platforms where people can engage with others who share values like their own. This ability to create segments of people with like-minded interests and values provides individuals - especially the youth - with a means for acquiring that feeling of inclusion and thus creates community and a common identity.

Online subscription and use of social networking sites is affected by various variables such as gender, age, level of education, socio-economic status, as well as geographic location (Saeed, 2016). In the online sphere, the youth are also the age group that uses social media most frequently. Overall, they are more likely to be social networkers than people aged 35 and older. For example, 79 per cent of young Internet users in Germany use social media, while only 39 per cent of older users in the country do so. The difference between younger and older users is similar in other countries such as Viet Nam (86 per cent compared to 49 per cent) and Japan (78 per cent compared to 43 per cent). In Kenya, 78% of the youth are engaged online while for those over 35 years its 34% (SimeLab, 2018).

The youth are self-sufficient in some ways; however, they require assistance in other aspects of life (Arnett, 2007). Life events that can traditionally occur during this period include attending college to earn undergraduate and/or graduate degrees, entering the workforce, returning home for financial help from parents or getting married and starting their own family (Arnett, 2006). As their time becomes more limited, social media therefore offer immediacy and interactivity in communication, two highly desirable attributes for young people that form a part their daily routines (Steinfield et al. 2008). Since the youth experience higher-level thinking and more complex thoughts than ever before (Labouvie-Vief, 2006), they require a lot of help that is non-judgmental in dealing with complexities of life (Collins, 2001). Many of the

traditional barriers to seeking help are reduced in online settings (Ivancic, *et al.*, 2018). Anything a young person would be embarrassed or ashamed to ask their peers or parent about—such as sexuality and mental health, or relational matters—they are likely to ask the internet. Ortiz-Ospina (2019) reported that social networks are a key source of information and advice; 57% of young adults said that they looked to their online social network for advice. Online sources offer a quick fix for those already well aligned with the digital world (Ilioudi *et al.*, 2012). For some youth, the Internet was the first place they visited to seek advice on intimate matters (Ivancic, *et al.*, 2018).

A study conducted by Griffiths *et al.*, (2015) shows that online peer-to-peer support groups are a main resource of social support on the Internet. For example, a list of Kenya's top ten online communities includes a consumer protection group (Buyer Beware); a gossip online group (Kilimani Mums); a group for sharing 'crazy stuff' (kenyatalk.com) and an investment ideas group (Business ideas 101) (Mwanza, 2019). Looking at these popular online groups, it begs the question: what specific reasons make Kenyan youth join online groups and choose to remain in them? This article explores some of the unique reasons why the youth in Nairobi subscribe to online groups.

Theoretical Framework

The computer-mediated communication theory was found applicable for the quest of this study because its propositions extend to explaining the end-result moments of the process of communication via the computer. The theory addresses the question of who is speaking, the nature of the medium and the effects of communication events for the participant (Holmes, 2005). The theory sees computer mediated communication (CMC) as generating a form of socially produced space (Jones, 1995; 1999). In addition, the many-to-many capacity of the internet creates a much more inclusive and participatory environment for socializing (Holmes, 2005).

The article also employs the Uses and Gratification theory (U&G) for its suitability in studying new communication technologies (Ruggiero, 2000; Dunn and Perse, 1998) and why people choose to use them. U&G theory is useful for analysis of audiences of new media technologies that present users with an increasing number of choices, motivation and satisfaction. This approach focuses on the consumer—the audience member rather than the message. The U&G theory imagines the audience member to be discriminating against users of media. The underlying assumption is that audiences are active, and they seek out that content which provides the most gratification, whose level is dependent on the level of need or interest of the individual (Fawkes & Gregory, 2001). Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973-1974) had pointed out that the U&G approach is concerned with: “(a) the social and psychological origins of, (b) needs, which generate, (c) expectations of, (d) the mass media or other sources, which lead to, (e) different patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in, (f) need gratifications and, (g) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones”. This model informed this study in the sense that, (a) the youth have social and psychological needs, which (b) determine the Gratifications Sought (GS) through specific online groups and (c) have expectations of the different online groups available, which (d) influences them to access these online groups, (e) and engage in different online activities, resulting in (f) gratifications obtained (GO) and, (g) other consequences (both positive and negative), mostly unintended, gained through the interactions with members of the online groups they joined.

Methodology

Qualitative data for the study was collected from the youth in two universities in Nairobi County, a young professional group in Kasarani, and a youth support group in Mwiki, Nairobi County. The sample was gotten from three sub-counties in Nairobi: Kasarani, Mwiki and Githurai. These sub-counties were selected because they were representative of all the socio-economic classes of the youth. Also, their close proximity to many institutions of learning where the youth are prevalent was a valuable factor. A total of 484 questionnaires were distributed to respondents in these institutions. After gathering participant responses through the distributed questionnaires, data were reviewed for cleanup. After the data cleanup process, 384 participants remained in the dataset for analysis, which was done using the SPSS Version 23 statistical software system.

The study also used focus group discussion and interviews to collect qualitative data. Four focus group discussions were formed drawing participants from two universities in Nairobi County, a young professional group in Kasarani, and a youth support group in Mwiki, Nairobi County. Eight Social media experts from across the county of Nairobi were also interviewed. The data collected was transcribed according to emerging themes in view of the study's objectives and research questions.

Reasons Influencing the Youth to Join Online Groups

In analyzing the reasons why the youth in Nairobi, Kenya joined online groups, each participant's viewpoint was looked at as a trend or generalization of identifying the reasons why youthful Internet users join online groups. If a participant's opinion/s connoted a cultural meaning/characteristic and major pattern, then it enabled the researcher to understand the elements that draw the participants to the virtual world and thus was selected as a reason for online group membership. To objectively comprehend the participants' reasons for joining the online groups, the participants were asked questions in a focus group discussion forum, where they aired their views, were open about their experiences and gave examples from their mediated virtual contexts. It was important for the researcher to organize her own subjectivity appropriately and reflect on whether it facilitated or impeded objective comprehension of the participant's world. An appropriate methodology was adopted in order to solicit complete meaningful evidence that was used to test the validity of hypothetical concepts. In this way the researcher was warranted in believing that the concepts illuminated the true nature of the participants' reasons and the central themes—which are the constructions of the researcher that go beyond the participants' literal words and objectively summarize the psychological meanings that the participants' expressed in the narratives and that represented the psychological significance of the meaning units. The narratives were elicited from the questions asked during the focus group discussions and the interviews with social media experts which were analyzed qualitatively. The key questions were: What Influences the youth to join an online group? And, what encourages the youth to be active, dormant or exit an online group they are in?

What Influences the Youth to Join an Online Group?

It was found that participants were members of: communication and media group; psychology class online group; gender group; family group; cousins group; church group; Muslim group; drama group; job posting groups; friends group; first time mums; nursing mothers groups; sports group; football group, rugby group; photography group; betting groups; Bungoma County group; glam my home group; Jubilee Party supporters and Kilimani mums groups.

As part of what influenced the members to join these online groups, the participants responded as follows:

Participant 12/2019 explained:

Since I am a first-time mother and a student, I join online groups that support first time mothers. I join those groups to gain insight into issues such as breastfeeding, infant care as well as what other mothers from across the country say about their experiences and challenges of being a first time mother. I learn a lot from these groups since I don't have someone here, like a close relative, to constantly advise me as a first-time mother. Neither do I have the money to go for Lamaze classes. I therefore rely on these online groups for information, advice and support.

Below are screen grab images illustrating examples of communication posted on the First Time Mothers online group:

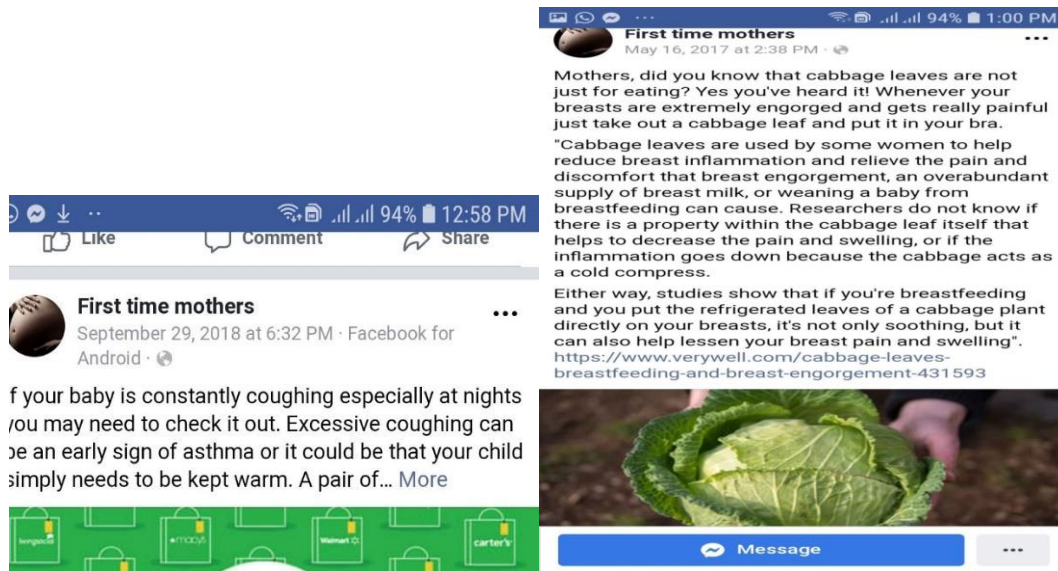


Image 1: First Time Mothers Online Group

Participant 13/2019 from the focus group discussion said:

I love photography, therefore I joined a group of other photographers across Kenya to gain experience from them, to learn the different angles that other photographers take their pictures from as well as learn more about cameras. This online group has inspired me to take great pictures as I study other photographers' work. It has helped me to advance my skills without paying the extra cost which is something I cannot afford at the moment.

These online groups enable the youth to access information and support that may not be easily accessible within their physical spaces. People like participant 12/2019 are able to access information about breastfeeding from other first-time mothers across the country. These online groups create social relationships of exchange between people with shared interests but contrasting social identity. For example, participant 13/2019 who is interested in photography can garner professional information from experts in the field, even though he is not at their level, status or region. These online groups therefore act like bridges that connect people together, moving information and support to members connected there. According to Putnam (2002), bridging social capital functions to bring together disparate members of the community. Bridging social capital provides low socio-economic status individuals with the potential to access resources outside of their constrained environment. Bridging enables people in virtual communities to share

information and receive support from others with whom they share interests or similarities. For low socioeconomic status groups, it is akin to Nan Lin's concept of “upper reachability” in social networks, i.e. the ability of socioeconomically disadvantaged groups to access valued resources such as information and instrumental assistance (Lin, 2001). For example, participant 13/2019 is not able to pay the extra cost needed for him to perfect his photography skills, but through this online photography group he can access that information from privileged others (professional photographers) for free. Equally, participant 12/2019 does not have the resources to join a Lamaze class neither does she have a social support in her physical environment who understands the stage she is in. These online groups therefore provide an avenue to bridge that gap that exists in the physical spaces of the youth. Indeed, access to bridging capital can be conceptualized as one of the distinguishing hallmarks of socioeconomic privilege afforded in the virtual space, as it is able to connect a community of similar individuals and shield them from the stigmatization from friends and family (Brown, Maycock, & Burns, 2005)

According to The Kenya Youth Development Policy (2019), the Kenyan youth face numerous challenges which include: limited access to information, unemployment, lack of finance, lack of skills and limited access to affordable credit facilities and exclusion in decision-making processes. Policy implementation in youth affairs is a big challenge since it requires effective coordination of different agencies due to its multi-sectoral nature. Therefore, parties that have a major interest in youth development have become very instrumental. These include: Non-state actors, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, faith-based institutions, and community groups, such as online groups which play important roles in youth development (Wleh, 2015). These online groups provide such avenues where the youth can connect to the more privileged members of society and through this bridging process, they can access knowledge, support, a sense of belonging and ultimately succeed in their various fields of interest.

Regarding the foregoing, some participants in the focus group discussion revealed the following as the reasons why they joined online groups:

Participant 14/2019 explained:

I joined a group from my hometown – Bungoma—because I feel connected to them. I understand the things they talk about. The conversations about development in our county as well as the leadership. it's always interesting, more so when they speak in my mother tongue, I feel at home... I feel at home away from home, when I am here in Nairobi!

Participant 15/2019 explained:

I am part of the online groups to connect with my long-time friends like my high school online group where we talk about our high school experiences; like the teachers we liked, it makes me feel connected to my high school family and I like that. Even though we live in different locations, in this group we even organize how to meet for re-unions, or support each other in the high or low moments of life.

Below are screen grab images illustrating examples of communication posted on the High School online group:



Image 2: High School Online Group

For privacy purposes, the names of the teachers have been blocked

Participant 16/2019 revealed:

I joined the class online groups (psychology) for academic purposes, for the purpose of discussions as well as to ask questions related to the units am taking and just to feel connected to my classmates for academics, support in school and life issues and for fun purposes; we joke a lot in that group!

Below are screen grab images illustrating examples of communication posted on the Psychology Class Online Group

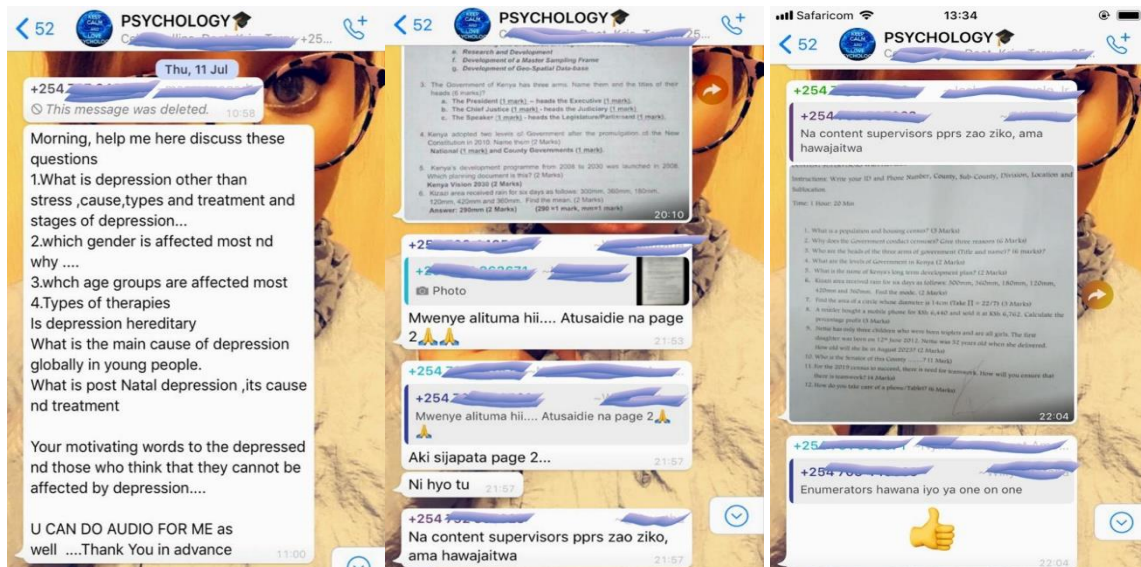


Image 3: Psychology Class Online Group

Participant 17/2019 observed:

I joined a family group of cousins to stay connected to them and to support each other in various aspects of life. They are my cousins, so I feel very connected to them both online and offline.

The need to stay connected to others remains a primary need among the youth. As the youth migrate to different physical locations for work, school, residence or marriage, they still have a desire to connect to those they know from their previous social engagements. These online groups afford them the ability to create continuity and community despite the boundaries created by physical spaces. It can be viewed as a re-connection and bonding of persons separated by geographical space.

Bonding social capital is a connection within a group or community characterized by high levels of similarity in demographic characteristics, attitudes and available information and resources (Claridge, 2017). This connection happens between people who typically have strong close relationships like family, classmates, friends or neighbors. The cases of participants 16/2019 and 17/2019 are good examples. These are people who know each other (classmates and cousins) and interact frequently. The individuals in these groups tend to be interconnected; the relationship reinforces exclusive identities and promotes homogeneity. This association is developed for support and connection. The youth join online groups for bonding social capital; they derive this through academic support, such as did participant 16/2019 in the psychology group. It helps them to stay connected to people they already know offline such as their cousins, classmates or former high schoolmates like participant 17/2019. These online communities therefore provide entertainment, a sense of belonging, strong connections and support in life, such as experienced by participant 15/2019 in the high school online group.

In an interview with Social Media Expert 1, she said the following with regards to the reasons that influence the youth to join an online group:

It's for gratification; the youth are looking to satisfy a desire, and the desire is derived from social expectation they are going through with the emergence of the social media, where you can put yourself online to sort of create your own identity, personality and connection to other people/youth. It's social ascription for imaging and identity creation.

Social Media Expert 2 in an interview argued:

It's for user gratification. It's for the benefits that they get from being in these online groups, such as information, connection, entertainment etc. They will therefore seek out specific online groups that meet their specific needs. Also, at this stage in their life they tend to need the approval of their peers; it enables them to acculturate outside of their families to the broader tribe, as they learn to rely on those outside of their family setup.

These online groups cannot be trivialized; they are powerful platforms that have the ability to meet the needs of the youth; the need to connect and re-connect; the need for support as well as access to information, and the creation of a sense of belonging. It is known that when the youth lack avenues to express themselves the effects are always negative; they either engage in violence, rebellion or even crime (Education Development Center, 2009). Studies also show that the youth are not quick to seek advice from their parents or other adults in the society but they will prefer to access the internet in its various forms as a source of advice, support and even companionship, because many of the traditional barriers to seeking help and inclusion are reduced in online settings (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). The internet is a key source of support for

young people, who are likely first to seek help on an online site rather than talk to a counsellor, peer or parent, especially about sexuality, relationships or mental health (Ilioudi *et. al.*, 2012).

What Encourages Users to be Active, Dormant or Exit Online Groups They are in?

In responding to the above question, participants had the following to say:

Participant 18/2019 in the focus group discussion said:

The topic being discussed in the group; if the topic is interesting, hot, or it's a topic that I am interested or knowledgeable about then I will be active in the group, if not I will be dormant or even exit the group.

Participant 19/2019 argued:

If I am familiar with the group members, I tend to be very active in that group, if I don't know them, I will mostly be dormant and if I was recruited without my consent, I usually exit the group.

Participant 20/2019 observed:

If people react positively to my views or comments then I tend to be active in that group, but if I am ignored when I make a contribution/s I will remain dormant and if I am attacked or ridiculed, I exit the group.

Social Media Expert 3 in an interview argued:

It's the vibe that's there; this is how the youth relate to the topics being discussed on these online groups. If the vibe is interesting and relatable, like topics that deal with sex, relationships, politics, sports, fashion, academics, celebrities, gossip, then they will be active in those groups because it relates to their day-to-day life. Also, if the people are open in the group and are discussing things freely, then it encourages them to be active as well.

Social Media Expert 4 revealed:

When the group is communicating to them they will be active, but if it's not, they will be inactive, and even exit it because they are not getting their values met/addressed. When their expectations and desires are not satisfied within a given period of time they exit. Conflict is another aspect that makes them inactive or exit a group, if they are not getting along with their peers in their interactions they would exit. They can exit or be dormant to save face, if their ideas and opinions are not valued, or if they are ridiculed.

In an interview with Social Media Expert 5, he argued:

When the purpose of the group is accomplished, for example, the fundraising is over, the members will naturally be inactive or even exit. Flame wars is also a major issue; when you give your opinion and people don't like it and it turns into a war that escalates and eventually the individual leaves to either save face or out of anger, or they just become an inactive member of the group. Also, when people post content that is contrary to the groups' objectives, it irritates others and they exit or become inactive. If they were recruited out of their choice and they don't feel like they belong there they may leave or just stay and be inactive in the group.

Below are screenshots from an online group (Media Practitioners Online Group) in which Participant 21/2019 is a member, where fellow members began to exit the group because of personal attacks on them. It was interesting to note that some other group members did not come to their defense but rather justified the situation by referring to other situations or diverting the subject by introducing other matters to the group

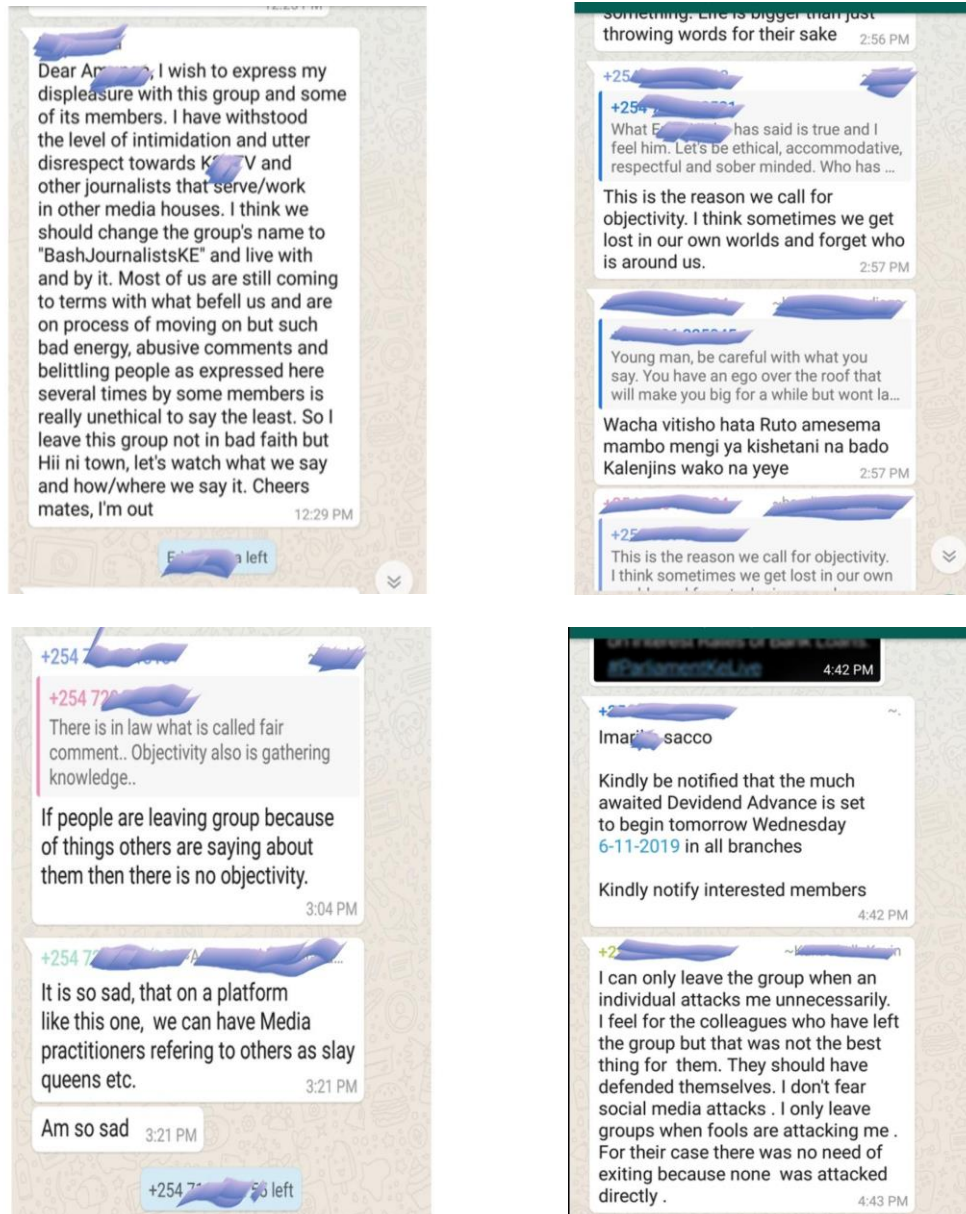


Image 4: Media Practitioners Online Group

Group participation and activeness is not automatic among the youth; it is a product of personal interest and group dynamics. The youth tend to be active in groups that address their specific needs, which are informed by the topics of discussion or the purpose for the formation of the group. Likewise, a sense of belonging and acceptance in the group creates a safe haven for one to be active. If the youth feel welcome in the group, they tend to be active, if they feel connected to the group members through common interests, such as a political party, a football team, media practitioners, classmates or first-time mothers then they can be free in the group. Even though the interests may be common—like in the above case of media practitioners and media interested individuals—they still want to feel accepted in the group, appreciated and not attacked if they participate in the group interactions. It helps if members appreciate their contribution and not trivialize, ignore, ridicule or attack them, like what happened in the above group resulting in some members exiting.

For example, in the Tweet shown below, this particular online group member complains that the online group is operating as a cartel, that when ‘some people’ say something people respond very well and comment but when others say something in the same online group they are ‘blue ticked’ (ignored) as though to suggest they don’t matter or belong to the group/ ‘cartel’. The respondent continues to say that this kind of treatment hurts a lot, and it makes one feel that they don’t belong to a group that they are part of. The respondent parallels this to the corruption in Kenya where some people seem to get everything, and others get nothing and worse still are ignored as though they are not citizens of the same country with equal rights.

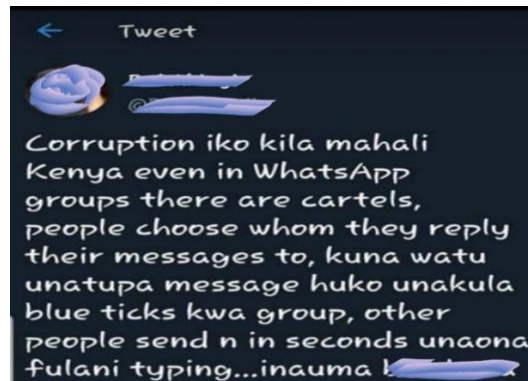


Image 5: Tweet from Respondent

The discourse in the media group and Tweet reveals that being an active participant in an online group is not as a result of one’s personality, but rather the personality of the group. If the group is individualistic in nature, where certain persons promote their agenda—for example Imar Sacco being promoted in a media group – the members may leave or be inactive. Similarly, if the group propagates values contrary to the values of the group, or some members are celebrated more than others, while certain members are discriminated against, then the negatively affected members in that particular group will tend to be inactive, disillusioned, hurt or even leave the group. When the group embodies collectivism—where they focus on the group goals, and channel their energy on what is best for the group as a whole—then the members participate more and give themselves more to the furtherance of the group. Maintaining this balance is not an easy thing, it requires the leadership of the group to steer the members to remain focused on collectivism and discourage individualism, expressed through bullying, shaming, ridiculing or name calling (like in the case of the media group, where some members refer to others as slay queens). Groups that focus on this type of interaction will always tilt towards being active and encourage the members to feel safe and wanted. It therefore follows that the members of an online group will be active to the extent that the group focuses on collective gain. When the group pursues, tolerates or promotes individualistic agendas, the group will tilt towards being dormant, a cartel of sorts or extinct. Maintaining this balance is always a challenge since group members come in with their own agenda, personality, status and titles.

Topics Discussed in the Online Groups

The participants’ responses on the subject of topics discussed in the online groups ranged from: politics, trending topics in the country, celebrities, sports, fashion, academics, relationships, betting, religion, nursing tips, and photography. Youth extensively engage in online interaction for information, entertainment, connection and academics. They will congregate around topics that surround their lives and immediate environment. They also navigate towards topics that are designed to shape who they are or want

to become. For example, they will engage in politics and trending national issues and address themes such as tribal alignments, political figures, issues of corruption and national development (see images of online groups discussions below). These themes are addressed with such passion because they touch on the members' core beliefs, strongly held opinions and alignment

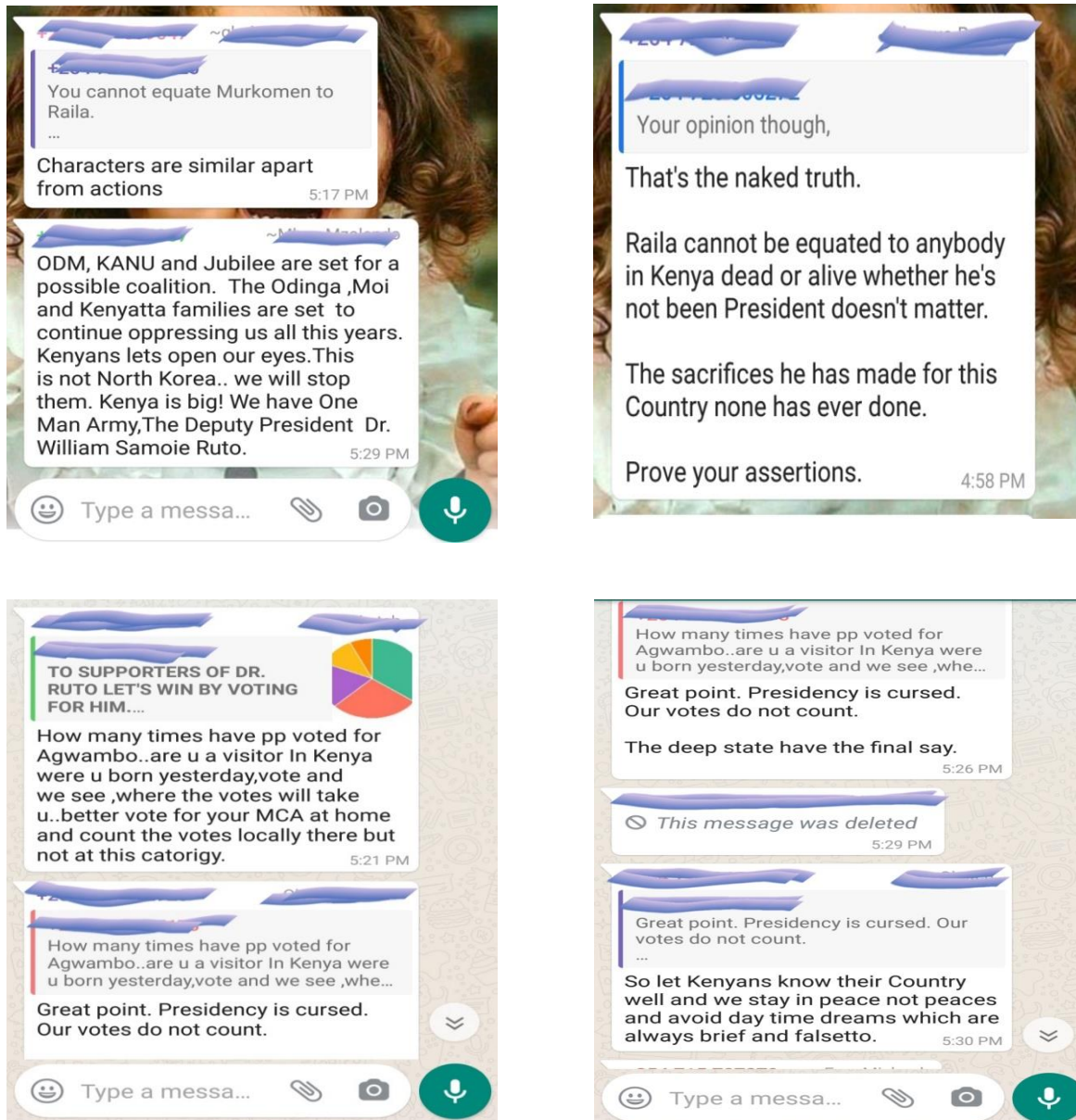


Image 6: Discussions in a Political Online Group

Some group members engage in topics such as nursing tips, religion, academics and relationships, addressing themes such as breastfeeding, weaning as illustrated by Participant 12/2019.



Image 7: From a Nursing Mothers' Online Group

In matters of religion, group members talk about doctrinal issues and beliefs as shown below in Image 8.



Image 8: Discussion in Religious Online Group

The themes addressed in academic groups touch on issues dealing with examination and topics that may be hard to understand as displayed by Participant 15/2019 in the Psychology Group.

Participants in social groups which constitute friends mostly talk about issues that surround their social life. It is a forum where they advise and help each other deal with the realities and challenges of their social life, as well as just have fun together.



Image 9: Discussion from a Social Online Group

In an interview with Social Media Expert 6, she explained:

Some of the topics on these online groups help to distract the youth from other aspects like academics and the realities of life which are difficult to deal with. It's something that is engaging and in it they can find a forum where they can express themselves, talk about something interesting or sensitive and vent their emotions.

This resonates with Waithaka's (2013) findings on internet use amongst university students in Kenya which showed that the students used the internet for various purposes, including to study, teach and do research; to communicate; and for social interaction. The youth will naturally be attracted to topics that embody who they are, what they want to become and what they are interested in.

The youth also like these groups because they give them an opportunity to broach subjects that are otherwise not discussed in normal social environments or with the people connected to them such as their parents, yet these are subjects that need to be addressed, understood and different perspectives examined. Subjects such as sexuality, sexual orientations, physical and emotional abuse, rape, mental health, self-esteem issues, addictions, suicide or boy child challenges find an avenue for open discussions in these online groups.

Below are screen grab images illustrating examples of communication posted on an online group regarding the boy child and sexual content:



Image 10: Discussion on boy child and sexual consent

Social Media Expert 6 also observed that:

In these social media platforms members are known to raise hot subjects for discussions and mostly these subjects elicit such juicy discussions and openness that members are able to detach themselves from the stigma even as they express themselves and share their experiences or the experiences of significant others.

What Influences Individual Youth to Join Multiple Online Groups?

Participants' responses to the question, 'what influences you to join multiple online groups?' were as follows:

Participants 21/2019 of the focus group discussion said:

To be updated, to gather different ideas. Every platform or group has its own advantage, so I join the groups for the advantage that I get. Sometimes I join a group for a particular reason and when that purpose is over I exit the group, for example my friend's surprise birthday party group.

Participant 22/2019 argued:

Diversity, for information, entertainment, as well as my current needs. I am currently in a make-up artists group because currently I need information on that. I once joined a group for hiking because it was my need then, to go hiking!

In an interview with Social Media Expert 7, he explained:

It's about them experimenting what suits them. They shift and create more groups, what works for them they stick to it, if it doesn't they leave. The virtual space affords them the opportunity to test different groups and even create new ones of their choice that serve particular purposes.

The youth tend to be in multiple online groups because it meets their various needs, something that one group alone cannot accomplish. They therefore enroll as group members in places where their various needs are addressed or where they find the kind of support, connection or camaraderie with like-minded people. Sonderlund et al. (2017) found a positive relationship between multiple group membership and well-being for individuals with high social identity complexity. Multiple group memberships indirectly contributed to well-being via perceived identity expression and social support, as well as identity compatibility and perceived social inclusion.

From the research findings of this study, majority of the respondents (54.4%) are members of one to three online groups, while 27.3% are members of between four and seven online groups. 10.7% of the respondents are members of between eight to eleven online groups, while 4.7% are members of between twelve to fifteen online groups. 2.9% of the respondents are members of more than fifteen online groups.

Table 1: Online Group Membership

Number of groups	Frequency	Percent
1-3	209	54.4
4-7	105	27.3
8-11	41	10.7
12-15	18	4.7
Above 15	11	2.9

Total	384	100.0
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Specific groups speak to their specific interests/needs; for example, a class group is for assignments, photography group for hobby, family groups for belonging and much more. No one group can fulfill all their needs, because their needs are segmented and thus the need to be in multiple groups. It is also hard to sustain a particular group beyond the life of the group for example a group formed to fundraise for a friend or plan for a wedding. Once the fundraising or wedding is over the group goes dormant or it dies a natural death, because its purpose is over unless the group members re-invent the group and give it a new purpose and even new name that is binding enough to sustain its life (Social Media Expert 5).

The image below shows a baby shower group that was dissolved, and members removed or left the group after the baby was born.



Image 11: Baby Shower Online Group

Members are encouraged to leave the group and close it because its purpose is accomplished (the awaited baby was born). Below is an image showing removal of members from the baby shower group after the purpose of the group was accomplished (the baby was finally born).



Image 12: Removal from Online Group on Purpose

Conclusion

The youth in Nairobi, Kenya join online groups to experience that intense feelings of camaraderie, empathy and support that communities are known to provide. These groups provide avenues for bridging social capital as well as bonding social capital which are necessary for the development of the youth at this stage in life. Studies reveal that many of the traditional barriers to seeking help and inclusion are reduced in online settings therefore making it a safe haven for access to information, social support and a sense of belonging. Also, according to the theory of Computer Mediated Communication, identity in cyberspace is seldom identified with off-line hierarchies making the online space a more convenient platform for community and continuity. The engagements in these online groups provide a sense of gratification for their users as explained by the Uses and Gratification Theory. Nevertheless, a commitment to an online group is predicated upon whether or not the youth feel welcome in the group they have joined as members; if they feel connected to the group members through common interests. Even though the interests may be common, they still want to feel accepted in the group, appreciated and not attacked. If they participate in the group interactions, it helps if fellow members appreciate their contribution and not trivialize, ignore, ridicule or attack them. Career, life skills, social support and sense of belonging are the major contributors to the youth joining, participating and staying in these online groups.

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