


Chapter 11

Motivations for Social Media Use and Consumption in Zambian Online Platforms

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ABSTRACT

Although considerable literature has grown around the motivations for social media use and consumption across Africa, there is still a dearth of research on trends of consumption across different cultures and particular demographic environments. Studies that have attempted to explore this field tend to focus on how social media and the internet as a whole have remedied individuals in different ways. Particularly, how social media usage has enhanced participatory governance economically improved people's lives. This chapter offers a rather nuanced synthesis and perception of social media usage and consumption in Zambia that underscores the motivating factors. Two major interpretations are identified: social media consumption that focuses only on the quantity of proliferated online content and social media usage that interrogates the various ways people in Zambia use social media to suit their tastes and needs. The two approaches underscore the debate in this chapter and highlight how most studies have downplayed the distinction between the two.

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INTRODUCTION

The proliferated social media usage and online content creation and consumption that have emerged in the wake of technological advancements in much of sub-Saharan Africa, are often hailed to have improved the general lifestyles of the people (Wamuyu, 2018; 2017; Wahila et. al. 2018; Wyche & Baumer, 2017; Akakandelwa & Walunita, 2017). Such arguments have become ubiquitous and almost inescapable to the literature on social media in Africa, therefore, revolutionizing and posing as a hallmark for theoretical frameworks that wave through the cultural fabrics of social media in Africa. On the other hand, media practitioners and other political elites are alleged to indulge in practices that produce media agenda and propaganda content that has greater influence on social media consumers (Madrid-Morales, et. al. 2020). While these assumptions have been substantially justified, the existing arguments are still patterned on the western models that are meant to promote the positive influence of social media in Africa. As a result, the actual practices and social media consumption tendencies of the people in most sub-Saharan countries are ignored and characterized as similar to other tendencies across the globe. In other words, as Traber (1989, cited in Mfumbusa, 2006) had asserted, Africans and their media are “foreign bodies in the cultural fabric of Africa” (p. 259).

Unfortunately, literature on social media use and consumption is often driven by western scholarship. For example, the effects of the Arab springs were made prominent by western scholarship, and later snowballed across all continents regarding the influence of social in mitigating change through youth empowerment (Howard & Duffy, 2011). Further compounding arguments can also be seen in how the notion of ‘Fake news’ has been brought to prominence after the 2016 US presidential election. Facebook and WhatsApp are the most widely used social media platforms in Africa. However, there is still a dearth of research on the two because of their diminish effects in most western countries. At most, Twitter and Instagram are the most used social media platforms in developing countries, therefore attracting a myriad of scholarship even in Africa. This emphasis ignores the role of Facebook and WhatsApp in Africa and the innovations that most Africans are making through these platforms. This paper, therefore, situates the study in Zambia, while addressing the challenges and the gaps in literature that accompany the study of social media use and consumption in most sub-Saharan African countries. The study addresses issues of usage and consumption while drawing and mapping out various reasons for consumption and use that have been innovated in Africa and for African, so as to address the needs of the people. In other words, we highlight the way people in sub-Saharan Africa have transformed the traditional social media usage and consumption to meet the needs and demands of their everyday lifestyles. Overall, the chapter contributes to the literature by methodologically and theoretically expanding the scope on the motivations for social media use in Africa.

FRAMING THE QUESTION

Debates about social media engagement and participation that have emerged in the wake of proliferated advanced technological tools in much of sub-Sahara Africa often take a Manichean prism. A schism exists between those that perceive social media as skewing the behaviors of people that actively participate online (Kubheka, 2017; Ephraim, 2013; Burton & Mutongwizo, 2009) versus those that see it as a panacea to a number of things, including participatory democracy (Bosch, 2017; Wamuyu, 2017; Nyamnjoh, 2015; Chatora, 2012). Such a prism extends to the current debates on ‘fake news’ and the

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