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Social Media Use For Internal Communication In Kenyan Organizations

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Abstract

Keywords:

Social media adoption, Internal communication, Organizational communication, Digital communication tools, Kenyan organizations

In today's digital era, the integration of social media into organizational communication practices is essential. The research aimed to assess the extent of social media adoption for internal communication, identify the platforms predominantly used, and evaluate their impact on communication efficacy within organizations. Qualitative research methodology was adopted to capture a comprehensive view of social media usage in three organizations. Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions with 48 participants, purposively sampled, employing thematic analysis to distill the insights. The findings reveal a selective adoption of platforms such as Slack and WhatsApp. While some employees embrace these digital tools, others persist with traditional methods. This contrast highlights reluctance within organizations to fully transition to digital communication tools. The study recommends that organizations strengthen digital literacy programs, establish clear usage policies, and foster an environment that balances innovative digital practices with established communication protocols.

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Kata kunci: Adopsi media sosial, Komunikasi internal, Komunikasi organisasi, Alat komunikasi digital, Organisasi di Kenya	Abstrak <i>Di era digital saat ini, integrasi media sosial ke dalam praktik komunikasi organisasi menjadi hal yang esensial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menilai adopsi media sosial untuk komunikasi internal, mengidentifikasi platform yang digunakan, serta mengevaluasi efektivitasnya dalam meningkatkan komunikasi organisasi. Metodologi penelitian kualitatif digunakan untuk menangkap pandangan menyeluruh terkait penggunaan media sosial di tiga organisasi. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara tatap muka dan diskusi kelompok terarah dengan 48 peserta yang dengan sengaja dipilih, menggunakan analisis tematik untuk menyaring wawasan yang diperoleh. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya adopsi selektif terhadap platform seperti Slack dan WhatsApp. Sementara beberapa karyawan menerima alat digital ini, sebagian lainnya tetap menggunakan metode tradisional. Kontras ini menunjukkan adanya keraguan di dalam organisasi untuk sepenuhnya beralih ke alat komunikasi digital. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan agar organisasi memperkuat program literasi digital, menetapkan kebijakan penggunaan yang jelas, dan mendorong lingkungan yang menyeimbangkan praktik digital inovatif dengan protokol komunikasi yang telah mapan.</i>
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INTRODUCTION

The internet has gained prominence over the years and utterly transformed humanity. It provides a one-of-a-kind platform for millions of users to communicate and socialize, allowing communication across distances without physical limitations (Joshi et al., 2022). Technology has now become an inevitable part of human existence, especially in the 21st century. It is from this technological advanced era that social media emerged and so far, it has taken the world by storm and is burgeoning at an unbelievable pace (Kapoor et al., 2018). Social media has changed the world. The swift and extensive uptake of these technologies is transforming the ways we connect with partners, obtain news and mobilize for political change (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2024).

The integration of social media into workplace environments has revolutionized how organizations communicate, not just externally with customers and stakeholders, but increasingly internally among employees. While the adoption of social media for external purposes, such as marketing, customer engagement, and public relations, is well-documented and widely embraced, its use for internal communication remains less explored and unevenly implemented across various organizations. This discrepancy is

evident even as the potential for social media to enhance key organizational processes is increasingly recognized by management (Chen et al., 2022).

Historically, the focus of social media within organizations has predominantly targeted external audiences, aiming to market products, improve customer interactions, and manage public relations effectively. Organizations increasingly use social media externally to achieve their strategic objectives, enhance competitive advantage, and build brand recognition (Laradi et al., 2023). Platforms such as Facebook and X enable cost-effective advertising campaigns, reaching vast audiences globally, unlike traditional media (Naik, 2015). Companies utilize these platforms not just for advertising but also for recruiting efforts, tapping into the technologically adept millennial workforce (Villeda & McCamey, 2019). The bidirectional nature of social media communication has transformed customer relations, allowing for a more responsive and interactive dialogue (Appel et al., 2020). Social media enhances public relations by encouraging mutual relationships with audiences through interactive and transparent communication, thereby augmenting organizational objectives (Gqamane, 2010). Moreover, these platforms facilitate two-way communication with clients and stakeholders, enabling organizations to receive feedback, address needs, and build brand loyalty (Okonkwo & Awad, 2023). These practices mark a significant transition from traditional to digital media in organizational strategies, highlighting the critical role of social media in advertising, recruitment, public relations, and stakeholder communication (Wang, 2017).

However, internal uses of social media are gaining traction as organizations begin to appreciate the potential for these tools to encourage a collaborative and engaged workplace culture. Social media platforms can facilitate more dynamic interactions among colleagues, break down silos, and promote a more connected organizational environment (Oksa et al., 2021). They support a variety of communication styles and can be particularly effective in organizations with diverse or geographically dispersed teams.

To achieve effective internal communication, organizations must critically evaluate the tools and channels used to convey information. Online communication platforms, including social media, are increasingly being adopted for internal communication, albeit at a gradual pace (Wamuyu, 2022). However, not all

organizations are prepared to integrate social media into their internal communication strategies due to concerns such as security threats, potential leaks of sensitive information, employee distraction, unreliable user-generated content, resource wastage (e.g., bandwidth), and potential reputational damage (Laradi et al., 2023). Despite these challenges, research highlights the numerous benefits of social media adoption, including enhanced employee engagement and responsiveness (Nayak et al., 2020).

(Ewing et al., 2019) introduce the concept of "emotional capital" as a novel approach to improving internal social media initiatives. Emotional capital refers to the collective goodwill and positive feelings employees hold toward their organization. Their findings indicate that organizations emphasizing employee emotional well-being can foster greater openness to adopting new internal communication channels such as social media. By leveraging social media, organizations can enhance employees' sense of truthfulness, pride, attachment, and enjoyment in their work environment.

Despite these advantages, the adoption of social media for internal purposes faces challenges. Skepticism about its effectiveness and concerns about informality and privacy continue to hinder its full integration into internal communication strategies (Ewing et al., 2019). In addition, the existing digital divide in technology access and usage within regions, such as Africa, poses further challenges for uniform adoption across all organizational levels (Vassilakopoulou & Hustad, 2023).

In Kenya, the rapid increase in mobile and internet penetration has set the stage for significant growth in social media usage both personally and professionally (Wamuyu, 2022). Therefore, the motivation behind this study emanates from the recognition of the critical role that social media plays in facilitating internal communication within organizations. By utilizing social media platforms, organizations can streamline communication processes, enhance collaboration, and create a more cohesive and connected work environment. The potential of social media to enhance employee engagement and facilitate knowledge sharing is immense, and yet many Kenyan organizations are failing to fully leverage these benefits. Additionally, this study aims to explore how Kenyan organizations are leveraging social media internally, examining the extent of its use. While previous research has explored the benefits and risks of social media for internal use, limited attention has been given to how organizations in developing countries navigate these dynamics. The findings aim to

provide insights into how these digital tools can be better integrated to enhance internal communication, thereby improving overall organizational performance.

The main objective of this study is therefore to investigate how employees in Kenyan organizations use social media platforms to facilitate internal communication. This includes examining the extent of social media adoption within internal communication practices, identifying the platforms most frequently used, and assessing the impact of these tools on enhancing communication effectiveness and employee engagement.

METHODOLOGY

Given the emergent nature of social media use for internal communication and the limited understanding of its dynamics within Kenyan organizations, a qualitative research approach was deemed most suitable for this study. Specifically, an exploratory multiple case study design was utilized to investigate the adoption and utilization of social media for internal communication. This approach allowed for an in-depth examination of real-life instances within different organizational contexts, providing rich insights into complex phenomena (Priya, 2021). Such a design is particularly effective in uncovering the complexities of social media use in varied organizational settings, where theoretical sampling rather than statistical generalization is the goal (Butler et al., 2018).

The research was conducted in three distinct organizations operating within major Kenyan cities, chosen for their expected widespread use of social media due to better access to internet infrastructure and digital devices. These organizations were selected from different sectors to ensure diversity in communication practices and cultural contexts.

The study targeted employees from the three selected organizations, encompassing a range of departments and roles to fully capture the spectrum of internal communication practices involving social media.

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who could provide the most informative insights based on their experience with social media in internal communications. This method is particularly suited to qualitative research where the aim is to derive depth rather than breadth from participant responses (Andrade, 2021).

The study sample size of 48 participants was divided to enrich the analytical breadth through two data collection methods: face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Specifically, 30 participants were engaged in face-to-face interviews, with 10 individuals from each of the three case study organizations. Additionally, 18 participants, equally distributed across the three organizations, participated in FGDs. This distribution was designed to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the research questions from multiple perspectives within each organizational context.

Qualitative literature inclines to terms such as trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility instead of validity and reliability (Creswell, 2014). The study adopted the four constructs provided by (Lincoln et al., 2011) to help in the achievement of trustworthiness in qualitative research. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility of the study was guaranteed by giving extensive details on the participants' information. Data was gathered, examined, and all research findings, regardless of their applicability or influence on the study's result were published. Transferability was ensured making sure the study's backdrop, the chosen theoretical framework and the research methodology were all thoroughly described by the researcher. In addition, the methods used for gathering, analysing and discussing the data were thorough for the results to be used in many study settings.

Dependability was ensured by the researcher revisiting the study participants and presenting them with the identified patterns and themes derived during data analysis to verify with them whether they were compatible with what they postulated during data collection.

Lastly, to avoid bias, the issue of confirmability was observed by using solely the data supplied by the study participants. Aside from the research interviews, the researcher did not use any other data. The research report was provided to the study participants to examine the findings. They approved the interpretations derived from the research thus confirming the findings of the study.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase guide outlined by Naeem et al. (2023). This method involved familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, deriving themes, reviewing and defining themes, and synthesizing the findings into a coherent report. This structured approach facilitated a

rigorous examination of how social media influences internal communication within the context of Kenyan organizations.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

Demographic data from the organizations revealed varied gender, age, education, and tenure distributions. In Case Study A, most participants were female (62.5%), aged 20-40 years, and held undergraduate degrees (Figure 1). Similarly, Case Study B also had a majority of female participants (56.3%) with most participants aged between 31-40 years and holding undergraduate or master's degrees (Figure 2). Case Study C had a higher representation of older individuals, with 37.5% aged 41-50 years, and participants had a mix of undergraduate, master's, and doctorate degrees (Figure 3). The tenure in these organizations varied, with most participants having worked between 1-5 years across all three case studies. The departments represented included customer support, administration, and communication, with some departments such as health services and legal services showing no participation. Overall, the demographic profiles reflected a well-educated and relatively younger workforce with a concentration in customer-facing roles.

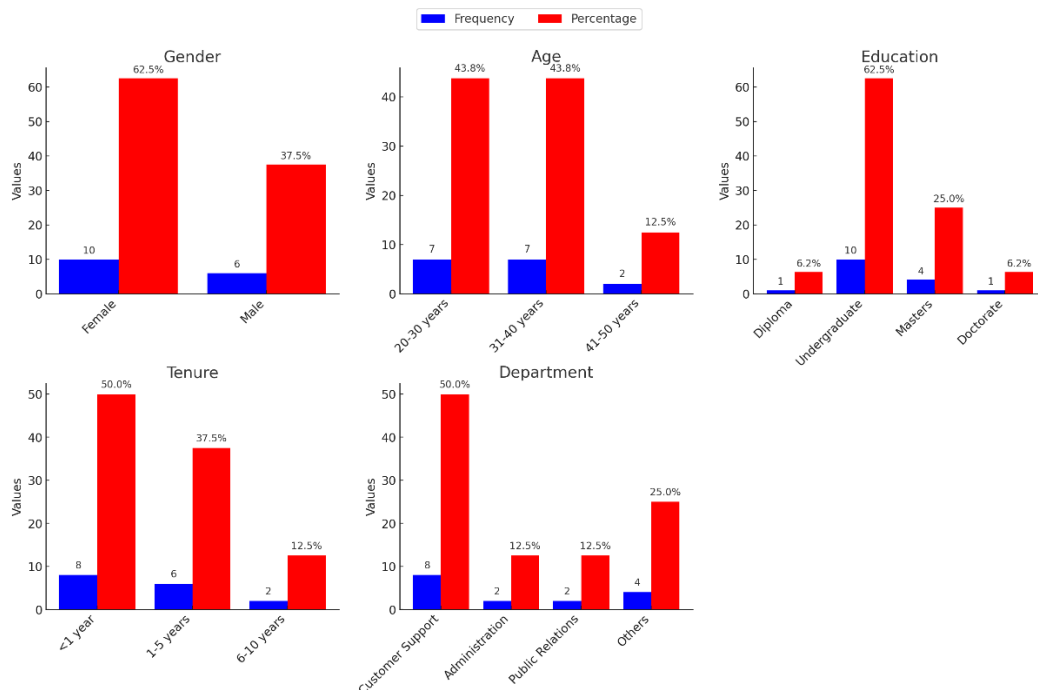


Figure 1. Demographic Distribution (Case Study A)

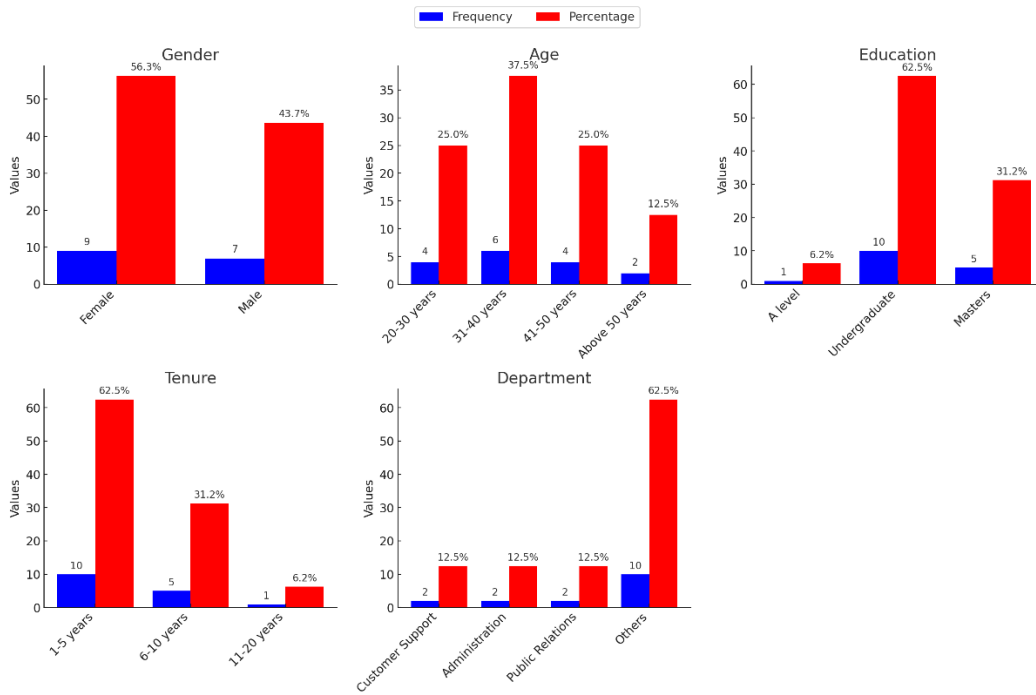


Figure 2. Demographic Distribution (Case Study B)

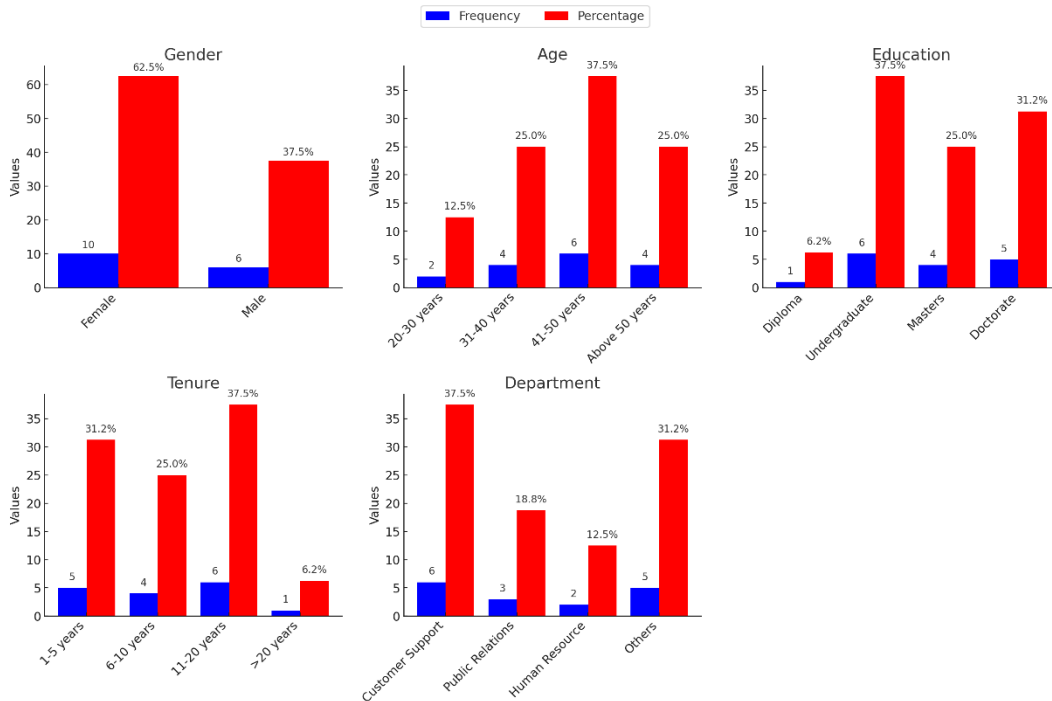


Figure 3. Demographic Distribution (Case Study C)

Utilization of Social Media in Organizations

The study revealed diverse patterns of social media usage across the three organizations. In case study A, Slack emerged as the primary communication tool, noted for its efficiency in disseminating information and facilitating remote work. As Participant IA03 succinctly put it,

"I can only say Slack." However, not all departments embraced this digital approach; Some employees, like Participant IA06, continued to rely on traditional channels of communication.

"I mostly use traditional channels of communication."

Case study B highlighted a more sporadic use of WhatsApp for internal purposes, with Participant IB12 acknowledging,

"We do use WhatsApp sometimes internally."

Despite this, there was a notable fraction of the workforce that did not engage with any social media for internal communication, as illustrated by Participant IB17's comment:

"Honestly, none at the moment."

In case study C, the use of social media was even more limited, with a preference for traditional communication methods such as emails and phone calls prevailing. Participant IC21's remark,

"We rarely use these platforms for internal communication,"

Typified the general sentiment in this group.

Effectiveness and preferences

Social media platforms were generally appreciated for their ability to streamline communication processes. In case study A, Participant IA01 praised social media for making operations more efficient, especially during remote work induced by the pandemic:

"It is easier and faster using social media than traditional communication channels."

Slack, in particular, was favored for its features that supported a range of communication needs, from informal chats to formal meetings.

Conversely, in cases B and C, while WhatsApp was occasionally used for quick exchanges, such as sharing memos or updates, it was not seen as a comprehensive solution for internal communication needs. As Participant IC29 noted, despite some use of WhatsApp,

Omayo Moraa Faith, Thuthuka Blessing Mbatha

"We really don't use them. We still rely on emails and calls. Oh, and meetings."

Challenges and Barriers to Adoption

The participants from case study A noted that there were indeed some challenges of social media adoption for internal communication. Some of these were preferring traditional channels of communication, difficulty of use, time disruptiveness, lack of confidentiality, data security issues and internet dependence. Participant IA01 noted the following:

"Some social media are difficult to use. You can easily digress on others and waste official work hours".

The same sentiment was echoed by participant IA02 who stated:

"The fact that some ways of communication are so set in stone that social media is seen as disruptive. This hinders the adoption of social media".

The study findings highlighted the following as some of the challenges the study participants from case study B felt could be brought about by social media adoption in internal communication: information security, bureaucracy, age, resistance to change, internet bandwidth, privacy, network issues and lack of smartphones.

On bureaucracy, participant IB15 felt that the management did not always support the adoption of social media for internal communication, this is because of work productivity issues. In addition, participant IB19 mentioned:

"Top of the list is our bosses, some of them feel like they hinder work productivity, they do not purchase some of these applications for us".

Findings from case study C included lack of clear policies, lack of smartphones, internet connectivity issues, resistance to technology adoption, confidentiality issues, difficulty in use and work unproductivity. Most of the participants listed several challenges. For instance, participant IC21 felt:

"I would say there is a lack of clear policies on their use from management, again not all employees have smart phones so when they are out of office, they cannot access some of the platforms. Yes, mostly that hinders their adoption. Also, future reference, I feel social media are not as permanent, so we need to complement hand documents".

On the issue of connectivity, participant IC22 mentioned:

"I can talk about our internet, which drops sometimes and messes up our communication but yeah sometimes your login you are giving a presentation, and the network just drops. I see that as a huge barrier when it comes to social media adoption because all these sites rely on the internet".

Daily Utilization and Perceived Sufficiency

Across all case studies, there was a consensus that social media was not being utilized to its full potential on a daily basis. Participant IA08 from case study A felt that the organization,

"can definitely invest in more social media platforms like Workplace," suggesting a gap between available tools and their actual usage.

In case study B, the majority participants felt that social media is not being utilized enough daily in the organization. For instance, participant IB16 stated:

"Not really, they could be used more. For example, the only one we use is WhatsApp even though there are many more which can be beneficial in internal communication in the organization".

Additionally, in case study C, most of the participants felt that social media was not being utilized daily in the organization. For instance, participant IC21 noted:

"As I said earlier, we really don't use them as much, so I can say no to that question, they aren't used enough on a daily basis for our internal communication".

Participant IC23 also noted:

"Not really, but at least we are trying as a department, other departments, not so much".

Same sentiments were held by participant IC24, stating the following:

"For me, I think we are trying but not as much as it is supposed to be because not everyone is a fan of social media. There is still a gap like our seniors are not so much into social media they prefer face to face meetings and paper documentation".

Impact On Work Productivity

Opinions on the impact of social media on productivity were mixed. Some participants saw it as a positive force for enhancing efficiency and facilitating quick problem-solving. For instance, Participant IA05 noted the benefits of immediate assistance via Slack:

Omayo Moraa Faith, Thuthuka Blessing Mbatha

"Whenever you encounter a problem during working hours, you can always post it on the Slack channel and you get help immediately thus improving your work output."

Participant IA04 further noted the following:

"Yes. I believe it influences work productivity positively. If I want to ask someone a question for clarity. It is easier chatting with them than writing an email. Having quick calls to clarify something saves a lot of time and emotions involved. A bonus further helps to appreciate colleagues when they do something good. Appreciation improves morale and good relationships".

However, others cautioned about the distractions it could pose, underscoring the need for policies to manage its use effectively.

Participant IA06 stated the following when asked about the effects of social media on work productivity:

"It does, but in a negative manner because most of the social media applications for example YouTube, Facebook and twitter, employees end up spending a lot of time on social media, getting distracted and in turn hinders productivity".

In summary, while social media holds potential for enhancing internal communication within Kenyan organizations, its adoption and effective utilization are hindered by cultural preferences for traditional methods, concerns over privacy and distractions, and a lack of supportive infrastructure or policies to encourage its use.

DISCUSSION

The evidence from this study highlights the varied adoption of social media platforms such as Slack and WhatsApp across different Kenyan organizations, reflecting the diversity in organizational communication cultures and employee preferences (Ten, 2017; McCosker, 2017). In Case Study A, Slack has become the primary tool for facilitating internal dialogues, particularly in contexts conducive to remote work. Its efficiency and ability to support diverse communication needs make it a preferred choice for many participants. However, segments of the workforce, especially those in roles that require physical presence, continue to rely on traditional communication methods. This highlights the uneven adoption of social media within the organization. Case Study B demonstrates sporadic use of WhatsApp, suggesting that while social media tools are present, they are not uniformly integrated into internal communication strategies. This is even more evident in Case Study C, where traditional channels such as emails and

phone calls remain dominant, reflecting a cautious transition in organizational communication strategies.

The study further reveals a consensus among participants across all case studies on the underutilization of social media for daily internal communications. Participants from all organizations acknowledged a gap between the potential benefits of these tools and their actual use. Even though various social media platforms were appreciated for their user-friendly interfaces, cost-effectiveness, and quick feedback capabilities, their daily use remains limited. This resonates with findings from other studies highlighting the need for organizations to invest in broader adoption strategies and integrate these tools more comprehensively to realize their full potential (Nilasari et al., 2019; Ogbuji & Papazafeiropoulou, 2016).

Furthermore, the study showcased the mixed perceptions of social media's impact on organizational productivity. Many participants noted its benefits in enhancing efficiency, streamlining communication, and enabling quick problem resolution. For instance, Slack was preferred for its features that enhance collaboration and immediacy in addressing work-related issues. However, concerns about potential distractions, lack of confidentiality, and insufficient policies to govern social media use were also prominent. Participants pointed to challenges such as internet connectivity issues, resistance to change, and management hesitance to adopt these tools, which hinder their broader implementation. These findings relate to studies emphasizing the critical need for clear guidelines and policies that balance the innovative benefits of social media with traditional communication methods to enhance productivity while mitigating potential risks (Ahmad et al., 2022; Jong et al., 2021).

Overall, while the introduction of social media tools into internal communication practices offers considerable potential to enhance operational efficiency and employee engagement, the integration process remains complex and multifaceted. Persistent reliance on traditional communication channels points to ingrained organizational cultures that value established practices. This highlights the crucial balance organizations must navigate between leveraging emerging digital tools and adhering to conventional communication methods to ensure comprehensive and effective internal communication. By addressing challenges such as policy gaps, underutilization, and

resistance to change, organizations can better harness the capabilities of social media to improve internal communication and overall productivity (Trenerry et al., 2021).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The case studies explored in this paper have underlined the crucial role that social media can play in enhancing organizational communication. They reveal the varied adoption patterns of various social media platforms, with some used inconsistently and traditional methods still dominant in some cases. The study highlights the effectiveness of these tools in facilitating instantaneous interactions and their adaptability to meet various communication needs within Kenyan organizations. The potential of social media to improve communication efficiency, advance collaboration, and enhance engagement is evident at different levels within organizations. To maximize these benefits, it is imperative to address current ambiguities and enhance digital literacy among all employees. Such measures would ensure that the strategic use of social media aligns with organizational goals and cultural norms.

The trajectory of digital communication tool adoption within organizations indicates a growing embrace of social media platforms to enhance internal communication and operational efficiency. This trend reflects an evolving preference for tools that support comprehensive collaboration, yet it also highlights a continued commitment to traditional communication methods. This scenario depicts the need to develop a balanced communication strategy that integrates both digital and conventional methods, accommodating diverse preferences and functional needs within the organization.

In recognizing the capacity of social media to augment internal communication and organizational productivity, it becomes clear that a pragmatic approach to its integration is necessary. Organizations are encouraged to leverage the immediacy and accessibility of social media while also addressing potential challenges related to privacy, data security, and productivity. By navigating these issues, organizations can strike a delicate balance between exploiting advanced digital tools and mitigating

possible risks. This careful approach will enable organizations to harness the full potential of social media in a manner that supports their overarching objectives and enhances their communication landscape.

Limitations And Recommendations

One of the primary limitations of this study is its reliance on a qualitative methodology within a limited number of organizations, which may not provide a comprehensive view of the broader landscape of social media usage in internal communication across all Kenyan organizations. The sample size and the specific sectors selected may not fully represent the diverse organizational contexts across the country, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the study focused primarily on the use of popular platforms such as Slack and WhatsApp, possibly overlooking the impact of other emerging or less common digital tools that might be in use.

For future work, expanding the research to include a larger, more diverse sample of organizations from various sectors and regions within Kenya would provide a more detailed understanding of the dynamics at play. Quantitative research could complement the study of qualitative insights, offering statistical evidence to support the findings and broaden the scope of data analysis. Further studies could also explore the impact of specific policies on the successful integration of social media tools in internal communication, examining how different governance models and training programs affect adoption rates and communication efficacy. Additionally, investigating the long-term impacts of social media on organizational productivity and employee satisfaction could yield an in depth understanding of the strategic value of these tools in workplace settings.

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