

SOCIAL MEDIA: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

By: Hussein Mukisa

In recent years, social media has evolved as a weapon for demanding accountability from public and private sectors.

Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X (formerly referred to as Twitter) have been regarded as avenues where citizens can air out their grievances, mobilize support and agitate for change with little or no disruption.

On Wednesday, June 28, 2023, a twitter space discussion was organized by Kampala Analytica to delve into the effectiveness of social media in demanding accountability from public and private sector institutions.

Chaired by Canary Mugume, a celebrated Journalist from Next media services, the talk brought together panelists to share their views on the topic.

The conversation highlighted the importance of responsible social media use, fact-checking, and balance between digital rights and cannons of communication.

Prof. Jimmy Spire Ssentongo, a philosophy teacher and cartoonist, explains that social media is an additional platform for demanding accountability supplementing the conventional ways that have been in place such as parliamentary committees, protests.

"It's not really a paradigm shift, except if by paradigm shift we mean, is this a revision of what we have always been doing? Is this an improvement of what we have been doing?" he wondered.

At the event, Don Wanyama, the Chairman of Vision Group noted that social media is another tool in the toolbox for advocacy.

"It is quite efficient, because when you look at what we are doing in terms of how people respond and governments respond these days, government responds to a number of tweets, especially if they are based on facts" he said.

He however, sent out a stern warning against the misuse of social media, highlighting the importance for responsible use.

"We need to be able to harness this new and powerful tool to use it for good and not for the bad and the ugly", he cited.

Lilian Nalwoga, a digital policy expert, mentioned the importance of balance in social media engagement.

"Social media has to be a two-way engagement, when we push for accountability, when we take a picture and upload, there has to be some kind of balance," she said.

The discussion also pointed out the need for fact-checking and verification of information shared online.

Canary Mugume, a journalist, noted that the exhibition of pictures and stories on social media has raised concerns about the authenticity of the information.

The conversation continued with experts emphasizing the importance of responsible social media use, fact-checking, and balance between digital rights and cannons of communication.

Lilian Nalwoga noted, "We need to find a balance between our digital rights and the cannons of communication, such as duty of truth and cognitive empathy. Methodological best practices can help create this balance, but there is no one-size-fits-all solution."

Canary Mugume raised concerns about the capacity of individuals and organizations to verify information shared on social media, particularly in cases where sensitive information is being shared.

"How can we verify the information shared on social media, especially when it's sensitive?" he asked.

In response, Lilian Nalwoga highlighted the importance of responsible use of social media and the need for fact-checking, even if it's not always possible to verify information.

"We need to be responsible in our use of social media and fact-check information, even if it's not always possible to verify," she said.

The conversation also touched on the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in identifying suspicious information and promoting accountability.

Lilian Nalwoga suggested that AI can be used to identify old pictures being shared as new and to help curate information from the public.

"AI can be used to identify old pictures being shared as new, and to help curate information from the public," she said.

Overall, the discussion highlighted the importance, complexities of using social media to promote accountability, and the need for responsible use of these platforms to ensure that information is accurate and trustworthy.

Social media has been used both positively and negatively in demand for accountability. For instance, netizens have used social media platforms to mobilize online protests without causing destruction of property. On the other hand, Citizens use social media to character assassinate leaders.