

How social media has evolved in Uganda

By [Rachel Kanyoro](#)

3 Jul 2015

Social media has become an integral part of modern society. There are general social networks with user bases larger than the population of most countries. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube and WhatsApp are some of the popular social media sites that are being used in Uganda. On 30 June, the sixth annual Social Media Day was observed. Over the years, we see how social media has changed the face of communication in the country.

Social media is an ever-changing platform that gives countless possibilities for every person to take charge of their communication. It has been created for the people and creative freedom allows them to do whatever they want on their accounts. Some people owe their fame to social media, not only is it about connecting with your friends, but now it has turned to push entertainment and political agendas.

In the recent past, social media has become more resourceful and users are now using this platform as a way to practice citizen journalism thus you do not have to wait for the newspapers, radio stations or even television stations for newsbeats because uploads of events are made as and when they unfold.

Michael Nyitegeka, an IT consultant and social media enthusiast says Ugandans are catching on fast with the social media trends. This has been largely driven by the increased access to devices such as mobile phones and computers and also internet connectivity. The demographics in the country also contribute a lot to the increased use of social media.

"The youth make up the majority of the population in Uganda right now, and they are more interested in using social media. This has also forced some of the older generation to pick interest in using social media," he says.

He also says that other drivers for the increased use of social media can be attributed to the political events in the country. Politicians have discovered the power of social media and use it to popularise their agendas.



Image via [123RF](#)

"If you want to campaign, social media is one place you can get to do that, get a Twitter handle, open up a Facebook page and this allows you to connect with people on an almost individual basis," Niyitegeka adds. The same applies to businesses.

Sarah Kagingo, CEO SoftPower Communications shares similar sentiments saying social media presently is being used to push the agenda, with businesses and politicians using it as a platform to promote themselves.

With the increased accessibility to the resources, people find that it is easy to join social media sites, with different telecommunications competing to be providers of cheaper and faster internet services which eliminates the problem of accessibility.

Kagingo adds that several businesses to flourish, they have discovered they need a social media strategy because this is the simpler way for connecting with the people in the market.

Social media, however, like many other media platforms is infiltrated with vices for example it is now easy to distribute morally corrupt content.

With the increased leaked nude pictures and pushing of questionable lifestyles, it leaves the younger generation more exposed to such. Niyitegeka says this is expected as it is a norm in the media for the stories that make news the most to be the ones that have such elements in them.

"It is a reflection of what the media looks for, justifying that when dog bites man is normal but when man bites a dog that is news," he says.

As long as people are in a society where they have been given a platform to freely express themselves, like social media they can set the agenda and make news.

Statistics

According to the 2013/2014 Postal, Broadcasting and Telecommunication annual report released by the Uganda Communications Commission, mobile subscription currently stands at 19 million and the number of Internet users in the country stands at 8.5 million users up from 2.8 million users registered five years ago.

For me, Social Media platforms have been useful in many ways because of the work I do - I communicate using social media, and also socialise using these platforms. Most of my news gathering and information sharing is via social media platforms, which allows me to multi task more than traditional media on its own would. Social Media platforms also allow me to reach many more people to collect information and feedback on a variety of issues which, again, is very useful in my line of work.

Simon Kaheru, media analyst

"I am currently not using any social media sites because as a businessperson I do not have time to sit and chat the entire day. I prefer to read the newspaper to get to know about current affairs. I think it is time wasting and it is ideal for those that sit in the office all day not people like us who have to move around looking for customers."

Yona Mugabi, businessman

"I have a great following on Facebook. When I post something, I get more than 2,300 views. My posts have a bigger following than newspapers in this country. I get many people who send me messages telling me how I am making an impact so I use social media to empower the people."

Frank Gashumba, Chairman Mali Group of Companies

"I use social media as a way to connect with friends I have lost touch with from my past. However, I find it distracting and time consuming especially for individuals that work in offices. It is good to use on social media but I think it would be wise to limit the amount of time that you spend on it."

Mariam Kemigisha, engineer

"I use social media to keep updated about the news especially if I cannot access a newspaper then I do not have to run around looking for one because I will find everything on Facebook. However, it is the easiest place for a person to destroy their image with all the leaked nudes of people that are going around. So one has to also be careful with the way they utilise social media."

Jackson Isabirye, operations assistant

"Social media is integrated with my work, I am in the advertising business and it gives me a creative platform to do my work and increases my scope of knowledge. It has also increased how often I interact with people."

Collin Asiimwe, Business Unit Manager Tonic Limited

"I have no business being on social media. It has not impacted my life in any way so I see it as a waste of time. The only people who use these sites are usually desperate people that are looking for partners and do not want to do anything productive with themselves."

Farouk Kalibala, businessman

"We use social media to engage members of the party and inform them about the strategies and agendas of our party. We make sure we post information concerning the party. However, some of the members of members of the party do not know how to use these sites and normally get misled by members with bad intentions."

Ben Makwal, UPC delegate

"It basically keeps me connected to friends who I interact with daily on Skype and Whatsapp. I have also managed to connect with people that I lost touch with on facebook and I also use it to promote the business."

Barbara Aacha, salesperson

"My peers have sometimes referred to me as a social media icon, I have used social media as a way to promote myself and now I get several calls from people and businesses that want me to create for them social media strategies to promote their businesses."

Sarah Kagingo, CEO softpower communications

Top 15 most popular social networking sites

- Facebook 900,000,000
- Twitter 310,000,000
- LinkedIn 255,000,000
- Pinterest 250,000,000
- Google Plus+ 120,000,000
- Tumblr 110,000,000
- Instagram 100,000,000
- VK 80,000,000
- Flickr 65,000,000
- Vine 42,000,000
- Meetup 40,000,000
- Tagged 38,000,000
- Ask.fm 37,000,000
- MeetMe 15,500,000
- ClassMates 15,000,000

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