

Social Media and Information for Poverty Alleviation in Rhonda Slums, Nakuru County Kenya

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Abstract

Urban poverty in Kenya has been associated with migration of rural poor to urban areas in search of better living standards. In Nakuru, these immigrants end up in Rhonda slums where they experience high poverty levels. Poverty here has been partly linked with lack of access to information. This study sought to investigate how social media can improve access to information that can alleviate poverty in Rhonda slums. The specific objectives of the study were to; examine the information needs of Rhonda slums dwellers, establish their available social media information sources, examine the hindrances to access of information using social media and suggest possible solutions. Data was collected in Rhonda slums, Nakuru from eighty (80) community members, five (5) administrative leaders and thirteen (13) service providers. Interview schedule was used to collect data. Qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to collect data which was consequently analyzed thematically. The findings of the study were that Rhonda community dwellers can alleviate poverty if social media can be used to access information that can enable them perfect the economic activities they engage in. In conclusion, Rhonda slums dwellers do not access timely and relevant information related to their day to day activities due to lack of awareness and inadequate information on social media that can alleviate. This study recommends that information workers should sensitize the community on how to use the available social media to access poverty alleviation information in order to improve their livelihood.

Key words: Information, Slums dwellers, Social media, Poverty alleviation

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The poor are not just deprived of basic needs. They also lack access to information that is very important to their day to day lives; information about market prices for the goods they produce, about health, about how their governments work and about the institutions of their governments. They lack access to knowledge, education and skills development. They lack access to information about income generating opportunities. Although information and knowledge are the most important needs of economic and social interaction, the poor are unable to enjoy the benefits of social media in accessing information.

Kenya Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 2000-2003 reports that urban poor live in slums and lack basic infrastructure and information on social amenities including pipe borne water. Their access to education is severely hampered and they lack knowledge on use of social media in accessing information. They have no regular work leading to illicit income generating activities like hawking without license, brewing prohibited beer, prostitution, drug abuse and today's bicycle and three passenger capacity taxi and motorcycle transporters (Kenya Commercial Bank, 2009).

1.2 Poverty Caused by Lack of Information

The most important finding from the earlier studies is that poor people know that they are poor because they are unable to control access to information on basic services such as health, education, water and extension advice (Sachs, 2005; Nyariki, 2008; Rajput, 2009). They cannot satisfy basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing. It is even clear that poor people think that it is desirable and possible to move from their hopeless situation. Inadequate access to information related to credit for investment has been identified as a hindrance to healthy life (Devarajan & Reinikka, 2005).

To support Armstrong (2011), majority of the poor feel that their potential to move from poverty to average conditions is hindered by declining infrastructures and government (service) institutions, lack of income earning opportunities and political unrest. The poor feel left out of the decision-making, political economic and even social processes (Devrajan & Reinikka, 2005; Shah, 2010). The poor can avoid such circumstances if they access information about the processes involved in demanding for the infrastructures and the services that their governments are compelled to provide.

1.3 Social Media

Information sharing through social media can be used to wage war against poverty in all developing countries. Sachs (2005) points out that for the first time in history, our generation has the power and opportunity to end extreme poverty in the world's most desperate regions. To meet this challenge, sharing relevant information that come with Education For All (EFA), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and ICTs are important for empowering poor people. Social media can facilitate interaction among long distantly placed people allowing them to express their views, experiences and to some extent, learners can communicate with their trainers without necessarily having to move from their local residences. This can work more effectively among the poor who are restricted to move away from their families due to financial constraints.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Rhonda slums dwellers engage in informal sector entrepreneurs. Some operate Micro and Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) like kiosks, hotels, grocery shops and tailoring shops where they sell their products and services to earn a living. There is no single banking institution in Rhonda. The community lacks capital to invest in such activities because they do not know where and how to access information on facilities like banking, microfinance and marketing services. As rightfully put by earlier studies, the poor are poor partly because they are ignorant about the power of social media information (Nyariki, 2008; Bandwidth Task Force, 2004). One of the biggest deficits that small business people have in Rhonda is knowledge of business and skills. Rhonda community lacks skills to run services like sand-mining, construction, factories and industries. There are many important initiatives related to MSMEs the poor have heard about but have no idea where and how they can access them. They need to know how social media can help them carry out their businesses more effectively. They also need information on government services available to small businesses in Kenya, public agencies (parastatals and other statutory bodies) including local contacts of trade offices, industry and enterprise development services. They need information on business member associations that support the growth and development of small businesses in Kenya, and donor and development partner initiatives targeted at the sector. They need to be informed of the production support facilities like the extension services that are important in efficient productivity.

The enactment of the new constitution in Kenya allows for participation of the marginalized in decision-making. Access to such information sources is wanting as the majority of Rhonda slums dwellers have neither seen nor touched them. New and more convenient means of communication through social media have emerged. The Rhonda community needs to know what services these technologies provide, where they can be found and generally how they work. Rhonda community is thirsty for information since it is a critical factor in the resolutions of their problems and consequent alleviation of poverty.

1.5 Aim

This study sought to investigate how social media can improve access to information that can alleviate poverty in Rhonda slums.

1.6 Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. examine the information needs of Rhonda slums dwellers:
2. establish their available social media information sources
3. examine the hindrances to access of information using social media and
4. suggest possible solutions.

1.7 Research Questions

To achieve the above objectives, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What kinds of information can do the Rhonda slums dwellers need in order to alleviate poverty?
2. What social media can Rhonda slums dwellers access information that can alleviate poverty?
3. To what extent are Rhonda slums dwellers successful in accessing information via social media?
4. What factors hinder Rhonda slums dwellers from using social media in accessing information that can alleviate poverty?
5. What should be done to improve use of social media in accessing information in Rhonda slums in Nakuru Municipality?

1.8 Significance of the Study

The result of the study gives an understanding of the information poverty of people living in Rhonda. These findings can be used by Rhonda community in embracing social media to develop networks that enable them share their experiences with others. The community could also use these findings to know and use the available social media to improve their production, market them and for entertainment purposes. These findings can be used by the policy makers in making informed decisions in as far as the poor are concerned because they reflect the information poverty status in Rhonda. The findings could also stimulate the government to put in place relevant institutions where the community can share information via social media and enact by-laws that may encourage poverty alleviation. They can also form a basis from which skills development may be enhanced. Lastly, the results could be used by all the poverty alleviation initiatives to enhance use of social media to access timely and relevant information so as to achieve their goal.

1.9 Assumptions

The study was based on the following assumptions:

1. People in Rhonda do not use social media to access the information they need to alleviate poverty because there has not been research carried out to establish their information needs that can be accessed through social media.
2. Information accessed via social media can assist in alleviating poverty among the Rhonda slums dwellers because it is timely, accurate, relevant and accessible and if it is used for the intended purpose.
3. Social media is currently the most convenient means of conveying timely and relevant information that can alleviate poverty but Rhonda slums dwellers have not embraced it because they do not know how such information can benefit them.

1.10 Scope of the Study

Though many initiatives have addressed poverty alleviation, the study was limited to the topic on use of social media to access information for poverty alleviation in Rhonda slums of Nakuru municipality. The study focused on the developmental activities that the slums dwellers engage in and how timely and relevant information can influence the perfection of those activities. The study also focused on the information infrastructures and services that meet the slums dwellers' needs. Such infrastructures and services included urban social amenities like information centres, education, water supply, sewage, drainage, solid waste management, roads, lighting, and community facilities that come with the growth of an economy. Findings from this study are specifically generalized to Rhonda slums in Nakuru municipality although they may as well be cautiously generalized to other slum areas in Kenya.

1.11 Limitations of the Study

During the study, the researcher was denied audience by some potential respondents who expected some kind of financial appreciation for their participation. The booming illegal activities in Rhonda slums come with a lot of hostility. Some potential participants retreated from participating in the study with the fear that their illegal activities could be publicized leading to their arraignment in a court of law. Until the researcher stressed that her study was strictly for research purposes, some of the participants were unwilling to cooperate because they claimed that earlier researchers had used the information to get money from donors for personal benefits.

2. Theoretical Framework

Three theories employed were:

- (i) Economic, political and social distortion or discrimination theory by Bradshaw(2006),
- (ii) Sense-making theory by Dervin (1996), and
- (iii) Ganokendra (1992) An innovative model of Poverty

The theories identified the information gap between the poor and those who provide for their needs. The theories recommend that there is need to bridge the gap and suggest that access to timely, accurate and relevant information will hasten success in the war against poverty. The theories recommend joint efforts by all stakeholders where information related to what is needed and what is available must be known to both parties. Studies have proposed means and channels through which information can be made accessible to the poor. Social media are among the sources where information can be accessed. Social media have been found to play a major role in conveying relevant and timely information that can help the poor improve their living standards.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study was conducted within the qualitative and quantitative paradigms. The qualitative research approach was chosen in view of the explorative nature of the study which aimed at describing the role of use of social media in accessing information that can alleviate poverty among the urban poor (Kothari, 2004). The study gives a detailed description and analysis of use of social media in accessing information among the Rhonda slums dwellers. The researcher used the methods and theories of information science to understand how the urban poor relate with social media and tried to interpret the existing conditions. Data was collected from various categories of Rhonda community that included traders, informal employees, farmers and social workers. Small samples of target groups were interviewed to gain in-depth understanding of how efficient and effective use of social media can be facilitate access to information that can improve the living standards of Rhonda community.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Rhonda slums in Nakuru Municipality. Selection of the study area was based on the following; Firstly, Nakuru is one of the major towns in Kenya where many people are migrating to in search of employment to improve their living standards. Secondly, it has many industries that enhance national development. The town has been singled out as the fastest growing town in Kenya today. Lastly, it is a tourism attraction area that should be considered in national development issues. Menengai Crater, which is a tourism attraction to both local and international tourists, is located in. Rhonda slums are located within the Municipality, to the south of the town. To the east of the slums is the Lake Nakuru National Park. To the north and west of Rhonda slums, is the industrial area whereas Nakuru rural is on the south. The slums are a highly populated area within the municipality compared to other estates in the town.

3.3 Study Population

The population included the general community consisting of traders, informal employees and farmers. The traders consisted of those involved in various businesses like vegetable sellers, maize roasters, grocery shop owners, food sellers, charcoal sellers, masons, cobblers, tailors and transport dealers. The farmers included those who engage in any agricultural related activities like poultry and dairy farming while the informal employees consisted of those employed on casual basis. Informants included government representatives (chief and ministry staff) while Service providers included extension services providers (public health related service providers), education related and garbage collectors

3.4 Sample and Sampling Procedures

A sample is a subset of the population which is selected to represent the population during the study, whereas sampling procedure is the process of selecting a sample from a population (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999; Kothari, 2004; Kasomo, 2006). For the purpose of this study, respondents were stratified according to activities which address different dimensions of their daily needs. The researcher considered only the two sections of Rhonda slum (Section A and B). The researcher adopted cluster sampling in order to get a representation from the various categories of the population (Kasomo, 2006).

For the purpose of this study, a non-probability sampling technique was used, namely; convenience sampling. A convenient sample is described as a group of individuals who are readily available to participate in the study (Kasomo, 2006). First, the study area was clustered into two administrative clusters; namely Rhonda A, and Rhonda B. The population within each cluster consisted of traders, food kiosk operators, farmers, informal employed and the unemployed. The traders were further categorized into those who operate grocery shops, bars, butcheries, vegetable sellers and those who roast maize. Farmers were categorized into those who kept poultry and those who kept cattle. From each administrative division, service providers and key informants were also sampled to establish the kind of information they provided and the difficulties they encountered if any, while serving the Rhonda community.

The respondents were selected from the convenient sample by simple random sampling from the various population groups in the two administrative divisions in Rhonda. Simple random sampling ensures that all individuals from the defined population have an equal and independent chance of being selected as a member of the sample and it provides more precise estimates (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). The sample size was forty from each administrative division. The representation of the general community included traders (47), informal employees (29), and farmers (4), while the service providers included personnel in environmental related areas (2), education (7), Health (1), food security (2) and skills improvement (1). There were (5) informants. All health, agricultural, education and financial related service providers in Rhonda were sampled.

3.5 Instrumentation

The researcher used semi-structured interview to specifically seek information on the existing and missing vital information for the Rhonda community. The interview guide focused on particular aspects of the subject area to be examined. Although the researcher's aim was to gain participants' perspective, the interview guide was meant to guide the interview in such a way that it ensured that the purpose of the study was achieved and the research topic consequently explored.

3.6 Interview

There were three different interview guides; for the general community for the service providers and for the key informants. Interviewing the general community sample was carried out so as to understand the activities the community engaged in to earn their daily bread and how they executed the activities. To establish information needs of Rhonda community, it was necessary to establish the economic activities the community engaged in. The community was clustered into two administrative sections from which target groups were identified. Members from the target groups engaged in various economic activities were randomly sampled. This helped the researcher to understand the information needs of the community.

The service providers and key informants were interviewed to clarify the services available to the Rhonda slums dwellers as this enabled the researcher to understand the extent to which the community accessed the information. It also sought to establish how the community used social media to access information related to their needs. The interview was then narrowed down to a non standardized interview as this allowed for more detailed data that enhanced good interpretation, analysis and conclusion.

3.7 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure that the instrument gave the information required or intended to be as Kasomo (2006) states, the researcher developed prompts by noting the main points needed to get information. If the interviewee did not cover them, the researcher asked for clarification like "what about..." (Gillham, 2000). Such clarifications helped the researcher capture what the interviewee had overlooked and yet was important to the researcher.

The researcher sought for clarification politely so that the interviewee did not feel like he or she was being coerced. Further, as Gillham (2000) suggests, the researcher showed appreciation and understanding which encouraged the interviewee to open up. Lastly, the researcher ensured that throughout the interview process, there was a lot of attention given to the interviewees. This consequently ensured that the interviewees did not get out of the topic of the study area.

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

Before data collection was carried out, a research permit was sought from the National Council of Science and Technology and an introductory letter was issued from the District Commissioner, Nakuru District. The researcher was introduced to the interviewees by the area chief and the village elders. This gave the researcher the privilege of meeting the respondents and clearly explaining the purpose of the study.

The researcher visited the interviewees in person and administered a friendly and simple face to face interview which lasted for an average of forty five (45) minutes. To obtain more data or clarifications, the researcher carefully listened and probed where necessary. Throughout the interviews, the interviewer as much as possible interacted with the respondent as an equal and recorded all the responses while ensuring that most important points were noted. In cases where the interviewees did not understand and communicate in English, the researcher translated the questions into Kiswahili, the national language. This ensured that the interviewee responded to the questions accordingly. All the interview questions were answered. The completed interview schedules were then organized in readiness for analysis and interpretation.

3.9 Data Processing and Analysis

Data was collected and later classified according to the objectives they addressed; information needs sources, access and challenges. According to Kothari (2004), raw data should be necessarily condensed into a few manageable groups and tables for further analysis. The researcher therefore classified the raw data into purposeful and usable themes and connections to explain the findings. Texts representations were used to explain the data. The information pertaining to each theme or which captured the similarities or differences of respondents within each theme was summarized according to the objectives of the study.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethics in research are a set of guidelines that define the researcher's behaviour and conduct before and during the study. The ethical considerations that were adhered to during the study were, attempts to avoid plagiarism, and respect for the respondents' confidentiality, anonymity and privacy. The researcher also obtained informed consent of the respondents to take notes. Research findings would not be concealed but rather disseminated after completion of the course.

4. Findings and Discussion

Rhonda slums dwellers like any other community in Kenya and in the world at large need information in order to execute their activities effectively. The need is as a result of social, political and economical benefits that are influenced by information. Consequently, analysis of factors perceived to influence effective use of social media in accessing information that can perfect execution of varied activities by Rhonda community in an attempt to alleviate poverty was done and the following summarised findings revealed:

4.1 Kinds of Information Rhonda Slums Dwellers Need

Many reasons have been put in place to explain the information needs of Rhonda community. Their information needs arise from their day to day activities. Rhonda community engages in business related activities and therefore needs information on business and skills. Such information can perfect their performance positively leading to poverty alleviation. The slums dwellers need information on Business Member Associations (BMAs) that support the growth and development of small businesses in Kenya, as well as donor and development initiatives that target the urban poor. They need to reach out to their business partners. They need to respond to queries related to their businesses promptly. They also need to deliver improved customer service.

There is a sharp contrast between the community and the decision makers. While the slum dwellers point out a wide range of physical, economic and institutional factors that do not benefit them, the leaders feel that information services that are capable of reducing poverty are available. The community is not contented with the information facilities available. They need other facilities like playgrounds where peers can meet and share experiences. Such need can be achieved on social media where the community can access online multiplayer online games, music and chat.

4.2 Social Media Information Sources Available to Rhonda Community

Services to Rhonda community where the slums dwellers can access information via social media are not adequate. Some key information service points like police post, libraries, information centres, and banks among other facilities are missing. The findings revealed that the community did not know what information could be accessed on media that can help them alleviate poverty except telephone services which they use for communication purposes. Use of telephone to listen to music, send electronic mails, play games, chat and message serves is not well utilised by the community.

4.3 Factors that Hinder Access to Information

Lack of knowledge on how social media works is a major challenge among the Rhonda slums dwellers. They do not know that information service is available on the mobile phones they own. They cannot connect to social networking sites like facebook and twitter. The community cannot afford the costs associated with the use of social media. The slums dwellers want food and shelter before anything else. Their income does not allow them to pay money for Internet service or library service as required for them to share information via social media. Those who practise agriculture do not know how they can use their telephones to contact the extension officers who can advise them on the new farming practices. They do not even know that education, marketing of products and news can be shared via media.

Newspapers, which are not easily accessible to Rhonda slum dwellers is one of the media that link people to the information that can alleviate poverty; for instance, it would help them know where to get employment, access market related information, where to go to if they want to upgrade skills and even basic details on how the government works. This is partially because of the high cost of newspapers and low literacy levels amongst Rhonda dwellers.

4.4 Improvement of access to information and poverty alleviation

Various proposals have been put forward on how Rhonda can use social media to access information they need in their day to day running of their activities. One key proposal is that training on how to use social media technologies in schools should be encouraged. This can be effective because majority (99%) of the community have access to mobile phones. Since the community needs information on how to access market for their products and finance, the community needs to be sensitized on how they can use social media. This can be done by the social workers within Rhonda.

Since poverty alleviation is a concern of the government of Kenya, it should use the available facilities to reach out to the poor to teach them what is required for them to access financial support. The government should go further and facilitate the education information through extension officers who can train the community on how information can be shared through social media. Majority of the community can access ICTs like radio and telephone for social information. They should therefore be encouraged to use them to access the poverty alleviation information they require.

5. Conclusion

This study observed that majority of Rhonda slums dwellers participate in informal sector activities. These activities are initiated for generating income to meet their daily needs. Therefore, information needs in Rhonda focus on these activities. While distribution of information structures for poverty alleviation is not by itself sufficient, access to information for poverty alleviation in Rhonda slums will be more successful when the community is sensitized on the available social media information sources.

Some of the reasons put forward for high poverty rates in Rhonda include lack of access to credit facilities and income earning facilities. In particular, this study has suggested that use of social media can provide access to relevant, reliable and timely information related to what they do. This can enhance generation of enough income that can alleviate

6. Recommendations

Rhonda slums dwellers should be involved in information provision efforts. The study has revealed that Rhonda community has access to media like radio and TV. The community other than accessing news from the media can also get to know other programmes that can deliver other useful information. With regard to economic activities in all the sections of Rhonda, majority of poor people with entrepreneurial skills should be able to cross the poverty line if they have access to information on credit facilities available on social media.

They can share information on programmes that prevent diseases such as malaria, family planning, HIV/AIDS, productive health and childcare. They can share and communicate information through telephone messages on campaigns against violence and oppression.

Today, change to focus on ICTs is inevitable. The community should go an extra mile to embrace social media because information is available in both the traditional printed form and electronic formats. This would expose them to relevant information like market prices, and also generally have an idea of products available on the market, including information on consumer needs. This is possible since the research has demonstrated that the community are able to access media like radio, TV and mobile telephones.

The service providers in Rhonda have a very crucial role to play since they provide the services the community depends on. These service providers should therefore sensitize the community on how the community can access their services via media. This can be done through seminars that aim to teach the community on how they can develop networks of people with similar interests. The media houses should vigorously carry out publicity campaigns on the programmes they air so as to enlighten the Rhonda slums dwellers that other than the news, there are other valuable information that can empower the community. Radio and TV media should include in their programmes more poverty oriented programmes and air them during the time when the majority can listen to them; preferably during the evening and morning hours. They should make sure that the interesting programmes are aired in a language that can be understood by the majority, preferably Kiswahili.

Generally, there is need to harness the opportunities brought by social media. The government should consider this as a welcome development to initiate multimedia in school programmes. They may be avenues where the community may access information through internet browsing facilities different subjects. The government should also reintroduce the open air cinema with educative movies for those who do not own TVs and other entertainment media. This can reduce the idleness witnessed among the community by keeping them entertained while they learn from the movies aired.

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