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Strategies that political actors use on Facebook during campaigns in Kenya's general elections

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Abstract
For the longest time now political actors have switched to using Facebook in the electioneering process. Facebook use has increased immensely over the last couple of decades as opposed to mainstream media, which was used in advertisements and marketing individuals during the electioneering process. The objective of the study was to explore strategies that political actors use on Facebook during campaigns in Kenya's General Elections. Sample size was 380 registered voters and 92 MCAs calculated using Kathuri and Pals sampling table. The study used mixed method in carrying out the study. The study findings revealed that huge number of political actors use Facebook during political campaigns as indicated by over 95% of respondents. Additionally, the study revealed that a large percentage (77.0%) agreed that social media messaging can aid political aspirants' victory in an election, the messaging strategy can increase votes, and use of propaganda as a strategy can influence voters positively and the strategy of choosing the mode of communication was useful in elections. Thus, is a positive relationship between strategies and success in the electioneering period? In conclusion, the use of Facebook as a company strategy was found to positive influencing the success in the election process. The study recommended that political actors and policy makers should embrace the use of Facebook in the field of Information Communication Technology for them to experience success during electioneering period. Also, larger Journalism and Mass Communication fraternity in incorporating social media in their overall strategy.

Keywords: Assessment, Strategies, Facebook, campaigns, general elections

Introduction
Background to the Study
Over the last couple of decades, technology has influenced people's ways of living and interactions to a great extent. The changes in technology resulted in massive adjustments in people's social lives, modes of operation, and relationships. Facebook remains one of the most significant changes resulting from the adoption of technology globally by participants in the electioneering process. Facebook provides a platform for access to ensure visibility among the electorate. However, Facebook and other platforms do more than highlight information by providing a platform for accessibility and strategic messaging (Bornschier *et al*., 2021) [4]. The concept of electioneering continues to change across the world as technological agility continues to sweep across the world. With an increasing desire across the globe for countries to incorporate block chain technology in voting, it is apparent that technology has a significant influence on electioneering (Aral, S., & Eckles, 2019) [1].
Britain's Exit (BREXIT) referendum in Britain highlighted the significance of Facebook messaging in the electioneering process. The context of this referendum was a vote on whether the country of Britain should quit the European Union. The proponents of the referendum relied on social media data to identify issues affecting the electorate and craft messages seeking to sway their opinion (Fujiwara *et al*., 2021) [8]. The discussion continued to elucidate widespread discussions on issues of privacy and undermine the protection of data regulations. The United States of America (USA) election in 2016 involved information data usage and social media messaging. The election was a tightly contested race involving Hilary Clinton from the Democratic side and Donald J. Trump from the Republican Party (Banks *et al*., 2021) [3].

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Donald Trump won the election by defeating Hillary Clinton in the Electoral College vote. The emails circulating on Facebook portrayed her as a corrupt leader who made decisions that resulted in the deaths of soldiers and undermined human rights. Donald Trump, a huge Facebook and Twitter fanatic, spent time on the platforms sharing information about Clinton's actions and explaining the issues surrounding her time in government. Facebook messaging in elections involves countries within the sub-Saharan African region. The most recent elections in Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and other countries over the last five years show how Facebook data helped influence the electorate.

Data companies, such as Cambridge Analytical, provide situational information that helps guide the messaging toward what the electorate wants. The Ugandan elections highlighted the use of social media as President Yoweri Museveni, the incumbent in the then-election, took to Facebook to discuss his political vision for Uganda (Ipsos Connect, 2017) [9]. The Ethiopian election showed the significance of Facebook messaging by highlighting key issues affecting Ethiopians. The individuals discussed key issues, such as trade, the need for change in leadership, and corruption. By highlighting the corrupt nature of the previous regimes in Ethiopia, Abiy highlighted the need for change in the election (Banks *et al.*, 2021) [3]. The changes highlighted the significant issues relating to the issues affecting the politics of the region.

In one of Tanzania's general elections, Magufuli and his opponent used Facebook to share their vision for the country. President Magufuli discussed various issues, such as his achievements in health, political governance, and infrastructure. The Facebook messaging touched on Tanzania's greatest needs, such as infrastructural development, ending corruption, and poverty eradication (Banks *et al.*, 2021) [3]. The focus helped highlight the need for change in the electorate (Fujiwara *et al.*, 2021) [8]. The changes highlight the significant influence of data and information in providing a persuasive platform to guide the electorate.

During the 2013 and 2017 general elections, political aspirants at the presidential level used Facebook to run paid advertisements. The advertisements highlighted their key manifesto and changes related to political growth in the country. The advertisements shared their vision, highlighted their core values, and focused on the elections. However, this did not yield much fruit, as they did not present an interactive platform for persuading voters. The single line of communication made it difficult to interact with the electorate. In 2017, Uhuru and Ruto's candidacies paid for massive advertising across various social media platforms, including Facebook (Nyabola, 2018) [13].

Kenya's general elections have transformed significantly from tribal elections towards issue-based politics, where the electorate votes for their preferred candidate based on their manifesto. The two presidential hopefuls in the 2022 elections relied on Facebook to communicate effectively with individuals and share information about their manifesto and vision for Kenyans. For instance, political leaders and political parties such as the Orange Democratic Movement discussed issues touching on his campaign manifesto, such as Babycare, which is a health-oriented system to provide affordable health care to underserved communities. The manifesto mentioned increasing funding for the county

government, focusing on the war against corruption, and addressing political land injustices. The existing gap arises from poor modes of adoption and inexperience with Facebook. The media, messaging, and communication on Facebook should be crafted professionally with awareness of the needs of the electorate to curb the existing gap in the industry. The study, therefore, seeks to examine usage and the messaging therein to provide a solution for addressing the issue at hand.

Statement of the Problem
Facebook's use in political campaigns has grown immensely over the years, and it has become instrumental in this field. Facebook plays a significant role beyond that of an information disseminator as it helps provide a platform for political discussions. However, trust in these platforms has waned. This powerful tool of communication has been used for misinformation as well as to fuel hate speech. Despite the massive adoption of Facebook as a campaign tool, there is little to show as to the correctness of its use in electioneering. There is a significant gap in the application of Facebook use in electioneering to elucidate a desirable outcome. The gap this study seeks to address is constructing a framework for using Facebook to garner the support of the electorate. The current study, therefore, aims to explore strategies that political actors use on Facebook during campaigns in Kenya's General elections.

Objective of the Study
The objective of the study was to explore strategies that political actors' use on Facebook during campaigns in Kenya's General Elections.

Research Question
What are the strategies that political actors use on Facebook during campaigns in Kenya's General Elections?

Literature Review
In connection to this, Maweu (2017) [15] asserts that "at its best, social media, which incorporates Facebook, allows people to express themselves and take action, and at its worst, it allows people to spread misinformation and disinformation and corrode democracy." Indeed, the influx of technology via social media is influencing the misuse of information. In a large number of nations, even though Facebook platforms are utilized for political conversations, they are also used to incite, mobilize, and generate hate speech, which culminates in ethnic violence (Mutahi and Kimari, 2020) [17].

Facebook provides an essential platform for communication. The framework allows people to interact and share information in a direct and authentic manner. Facebook platforms, such as Facebook, allow individuals to share information about personal and public updates. The platform allows for the sharing of audio, visual, and written forms of communication. The nature of communication allows individuals to interact and discuss issues affecting them on a personal level. Over the last couple of decades, Facebook has helped raise activism as people share information on political issues affecting the country (Fujiwara *et al.*, 2021) [8].

Facebook has largely been used by young people to plan and organize protest activities; for example, in the Occupy Parliament Movement (OPM), Facebook was largely relied

upon to mobilize the youth into protests (Mukhongo, 2014) [18]. The majority have associated the group with that of Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in New York, USA. In many instances, Facebook has encouraged and empowered youths in the grassroots to engage in violence without the control of the people who are in power (Makinen and Kuira, 2008) [19]. There is a change in the political landscape in Africa due to trends in the accelerated utilization of Facebook in the African context (Dwyer & Molony, 2019) [20]. A large number of aspiring politicians have become aware of these facts. Whereas some use Facebook for their unique reasons,

nations like Chad have pointed it out and regarded its use as a threat (Ibid.). An increased use of Facebook has been complemented by censorship and fake news in the African context. False news can be equated to rumors and propaganda, which are engaged by politicians in order to distort the entire information for political scores (Mutahi & Kimari, 2020; Maweu, 2020) [17, 16]. In a period of five years, Facebook users in Africa doubled, and almost 250 million people in Africa have less than five years of Facebook use (Bajo, 2019) [21].
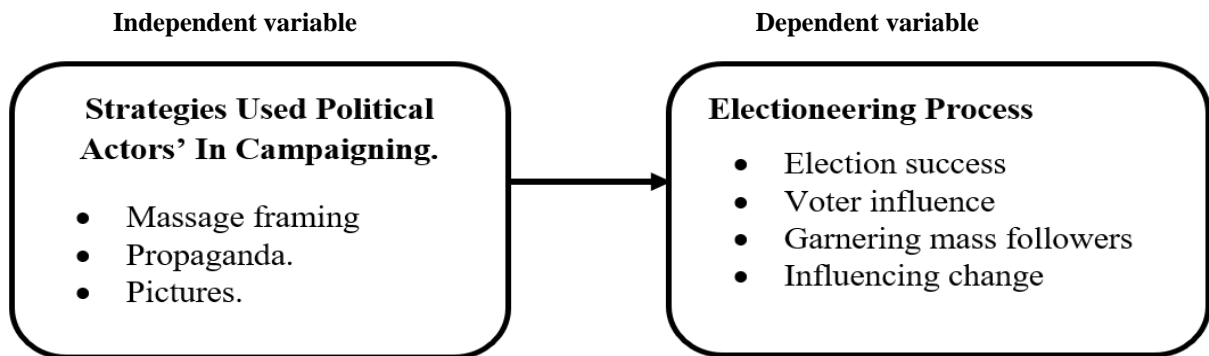
Conceptual Framework

Independent variable   **Dependent variable**

Fig 1: Conceptual framework

Research Methodology

Research methodology is defined as the approach the researcher adopts in undertaking the research project (Leedy & Ormrod 2001) [22]. Quantitative research involves the collection of quantitative data, which leads to quantification and submission to statistical treatment. (In order to refute the support claims made by Creswell, 2003) [23] The current study used a mixed research method where both qualitative and quantitative data were utilized. Quantitative research methods, where percentages were used to respond to research questions.

Further, the study used a descriptive survey research design. Research design is a plan or strategy that one uses to investigate research questions or objectives (Christensen, 2012) [5]. The mixed research design was appropriate because it provides a better understanding of research problems and complex phenomena than either approach alone (Creswell & Clark, 2007) [7]. The research was carried out in Nairobi County, Kenya, with a total population of 4,397,073 (Census 2019).

During the study, the research had The target population of the study was 2,415,410 registered voters and 123 Members of the County Assembly (MCAs), who were randomly drawn from the Nairobi metropolitan areas and used the Facebook platform. Data were collected in Kenya from respondents in Nairobi. Nairobi was a primary selection for the study because it is a cosmopolitan area comprising people from various parts of the country and tribal affiliations; hence, it provides a true reflection of the electorate in Kenya. The population of the study included voters characterized by various demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, social class, level of education, and political awareness.

Further, the study relied on Kathuri & Pals (1993) [11] sampling table to select the sample size. The sample size for this study was 380 electorates from 10 demographics drawn

from various parts of the county. In this case, the sample was drawn from each of the relevant demographics that were essential for the research. For comparison of responses, 92 MCAs were sampled from a population of 123, as informed by the sampling table.

Validity and reliability were conducted to ensure the data were reliable and valid for analysis and the making of informed decisions and conclusions. The University supervisors as well as research Experts reviewed the instruments and ensured their validity. On the other hand, the study conducted a pilot test to examine the reliability of the data collection instrument. The data collected from the pilot test was used to calculate the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient used to assess the internal consistency of the research items at the cut-off point of 0.7 (Zikmud, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013) [24].

Both primary and secondary data were collected in this study. Secondary data from journals, books, and newspapers were used to explain the primary data collected from the population of the study. Primary data were sourced from the questionnaires submitted by the respondents. The closed-ended questionnaires used a 5-point Likert scale to score responses. The questionnaires were self-administered, and the responses were entered into IBM SPSS version 26 statistical software for reliability analysis.

All completed questionnaires were coded and entered into an Excel sheet for cleaning, and then imported into SPSS statistical software version 26 for analysis with the assistance of a data analyst. The responses were analyzed for descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data into frequencies and percentages. Where the findings were presented in tabular and graphic presentations (pie charts, bar graphs). Additionally, the qualitative data collected from the MCAs through the interview schedules were analyzed qualitativel.

Results
Response rate
The table below illustrates the response rate on the returned and unreturned questionnaires. A total of 380 questionnaires were administered electronically, of which 335 (88.16%) were returned and 45 (11.84%) were not.

Table 1: Response rate

Response	Frequency	Response Rate
Returned	335	88.16%
Not Returned	45	11.84%
Total	380	100.00

Source: Researcher (2023)

Gender
Table 2 shows that the number of male participants in the study was 78, which translates to 23.3%, while the number of female respondents was 76.7%. This shows that there was effective participation by female respondents compared to male respondents.

Table 2: Gender of the respondent

Gender	N	Percentage (%)
Male	78	23.3%
Female	257	76.7%
Total	335	100

Source: Researcher (2023)

Education level
Figure 3 shows the trends of participants' responses on levels of education. It was revealed that the majority of respondents were Kenya Certificate of secondary education (KCSE) holders (30.75%). Those who had a master's degree were 22.30%, followed by Kenya certificate of primary education (KCPE) holders (16.72), diploma holders 6.36%, and finally, Ph.D. holders 4.48%. This implies that the least number of participants were Ph.D. holders. This is consistent with the trends of Ph.D. holders in society, which is a small number in any community.
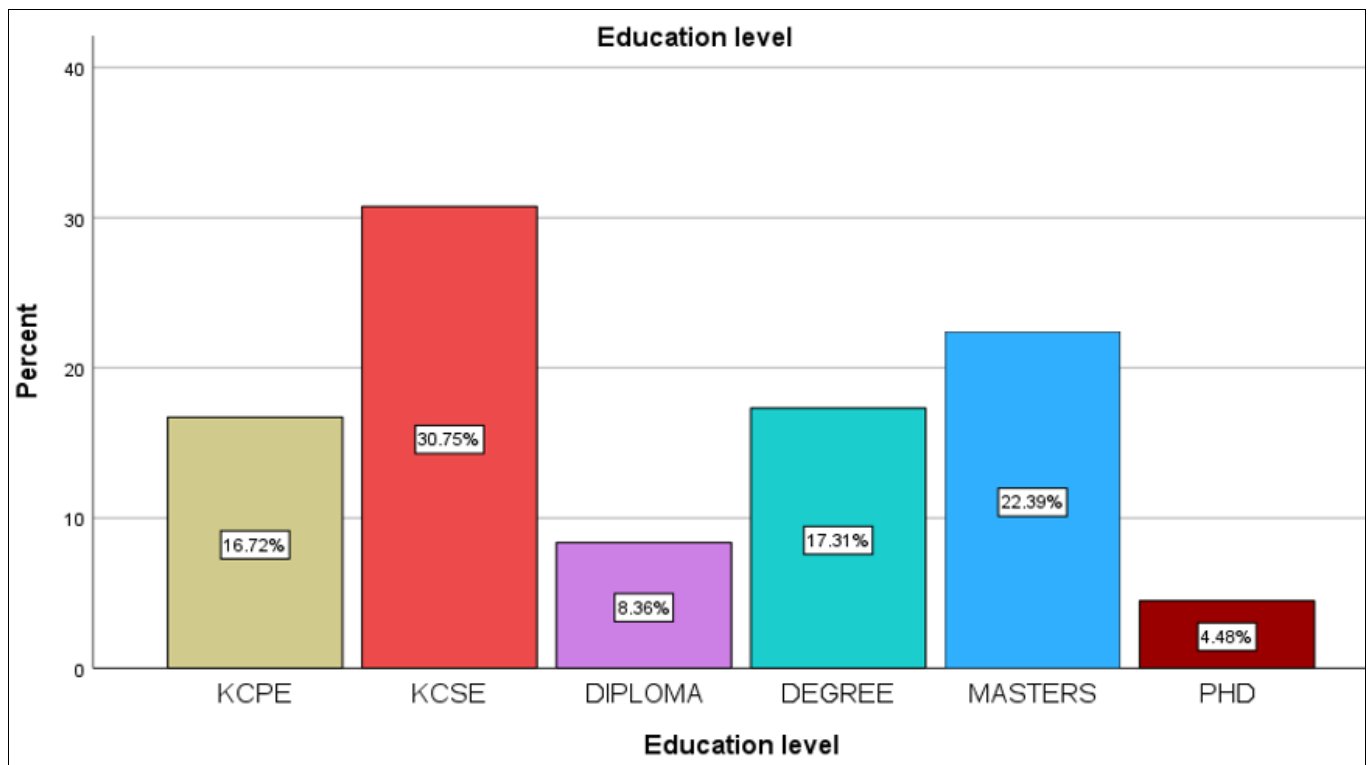

Fig 2: Education

Descriptive Statistics
The study's main objective was to explore strategies that political actors' use on Facebook during campaigns in Kenya's General Elections. Respondents were able to rate their respondents using a Likert scale to show their levels of agreement with the given statement. Table 3 shows the distributions of the strategies used in messaging to target certain audiences.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The use of propaganda as a strategy on Facebook is a significant tool that enhances political success.	335	3.5776	1.13275
The use of videos and cartons against opponents' increases political mileage, hence success.	335	3.3731	1.14823
The method used in message framing on Facebook determines the level of political acceptance during the electioneering process.	335	3.7642	1.08662
In passing the message, the use of pictures to pass the message improved its political acceptance.	335	3.7045	1.05215
Generally, the use of Facebook is a significant strategy that enhances success during the electioneering period.	335	3.9731	.8878
Valid N (listwise)	335		
Average		3.6785	1.06151

This objective was measured using descriptive statistics, and the variable was measured using five statements. The five statements were analyzed in terms of mean and standard deviation. On the first statement, whether the use of propaganda as a strategy on Facebook is a significant tool that enhances political success, the results revealed that the majority of the respondent moderately agreed with the stamen with a mean of 3.5776. While the standard deviation of 1.13275 showed that there were minimally diverse responses regarding the statement.

Also, on the statement, the use of videos and cartons against opponents increases enhances the political mileage, hence success. The results revealed that the responses were neutral regarding the statement, as revealed by the mean of 3.3731 and the standard deviation of 1.14823, implying the presence of diverse responses. In addition, the respondents were asked whether the method used in message framing on Facebook determines the political acceptable during the electioneering process. The result shows the respondents just agreed with the statement. This can be shown by the mean of 3.7642 depicted. While the standard deviation of 1.05215 shows very minimal and diverse responses regarding the statement.

On the statement, whether the strategies of passing the message and the use of pictures to pass the message improved political acceptance, the results showed that the respondent agreed with the statement. This is revealed by the mean of 3.7045. Lastly, the respondents were asked to indicate whether, generally, the use of Facebook is a significant strategy that enhances success during the electioneering period. The result showed that respondents strongly agreed that the use of Facebook in campaigning positively enhanced acceptance. This was shown by the mean of 3.9731, while the standard deviation depicted very minimally diverse responses regarding the statement. Thus, generally, there is a positive relationship between strategies and success in the electioneering period. This can be shown by the average mean of 3.6785. Implying that respondents were in agreement with most of the statements regarding the strategies that political actors use on Facebook during campaigns in Kenya's General Elections. On the other hand, the standard deviation of 1.06151 implies that there were minimally diverse responses regarding most of the statements.

This means that, to a large extent, the use of Facebook communication, particularly messaging, is able to assist a political aspirant in reaching a targeted audience, thereby raising the possibility of winning the contested political positions. The findings were consistent with those of Omanga (2019) [14], who informed that SMS text messaging and, generally, Facebook communication have been found to be the most preferred messaging systems, cognizant of the fact that they are more affordable and reach the target audience within anticipated timelines.

In the qualitative study, responses from the key informants supported these findings that the use of Facebook was ideal for enhancing success in the campaigning period and hence success in the election process. For instance, as indicated by MCANC01'

"I use Facebook as a way of getting in touch with my clients within a very short time. Additionally, Facebook helps me to be known beyond my area of campaigning. MCANC01

This implies that Facebook is an important form of communication between voters and political actors and plays a significant role in the decisions made by voters.

Further Discussions
The study disclosed that political actors who succeed in their political aspirations use Facebook to communicate with their voters effectively. It was also found that 95% of political actors use Facebook during campaigns, which eventually culminates in their successes. Largely, it was noted that social media tools were instrumental in the election victories celebrated by politicians. The use of Facebook spreads propaganda during the campaigning period, where voters are given wrong information that changes their voting patterns. The study further unearthed that Facebook use during election time assists politicians in gaining victory, as indicated by 77% of respondents. To sum up, the study found that the best way to reach voters is to use Facebook. These communications are able to make voters make more informed decisions; hence, they impact voter decisions.

Conclusions
In conclusion, Facebook offers a vast user base in Kenya, making it an attractive platform for political actors to reach a large number of potential voters. Through targeted advertising and organic content, politicians can engage with citizens, share their messages, and promote their campaigns more effectively. Also, it can be noted that Facebook offers cost-effective advertising options compared to traditional media channels. Political actors can allocate their campaign budgets efficiently, reaching a larger audience at a lower cost. This can level the playing field for candidates with limited financial resources, enabling them to compete more effectively.

In addition, Facebook allows political actors to communicate directly with voters in real time, enabling them to share updates and news and respond to queries or concerns promptly. This facilitates a more interactive and responsive campaign environment, fostering a sense of engagement and connection between candidates and citizens. Facebook provides an opportunity for political actors to establish and enhance their public image and personal branding. By maintaining an active presence on the platform, politicians can raise awareness of their political agenda, build credibility, and strengthen their online reputation, leading to increased visibility among voters.

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