

Abstract

This chapter examines if the increased political discussions on social media especially Twitter and Face Book before and after the March 4th, 2013 general elections in Kenya translated to a more robust Alternative Public Sphere that broke the hegemony of the traditional media as Agenda setters or an alternative space for the audience to vent out their frustrations and grievances about the election. In the last most contentious elections in 2007, in Kenya, both new and old media were blamed for fueling ethnic hate speech which culminated into the 2007/ 2008 post election violence. It is argued in this chapter that although voting patterns in the March 2013 elections were clearly along ethnic lines just like in 2007, there was no physical post election violence like was the case in 2008. What was clearly evident was Ethnic hate speech before and after the general elections on social media networks. We therefore observe that unlike in 2008 where ethnic violence was fought in the streets, in the 2013 general elections, the 'Ethnic War was Networked'. The chapter analyses the content of some of the messages send on Twitter and Face Book to argue that social media platforms only acted as alternative spaces for Kenyans to fight out their ethnic political wars and not alternative public spheres for constructive political deliberation. The chapter concludes by observing that social media networks in the 2013 general elections in Kenya acted as 'Opiums of the Masses' only serving the function of keeping Kenya 'quiet and peaceful' to prevent a repeat of the 2008 post election violence, but not alternative public spheres to facilitate constructive political deliberation.