American Journal of Innovation in Science and Engineering (AJISE)

ISSN: 2158-7205 (ONLINE)

VOLUME 5 ISSUE 1 (2026)

PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

American Journal of Innovation in Science and Engineering (AJISE)

Volume 5 Issue 1, Year 2026
ISSN: 2158-7205 (Online)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.54536/ajise.v5i1.6976
https://journals.e-palli.com/home/index.php/ajise

Transparency by Design: How Social Media Platforms Shape Corporate Accountability Practices in Kenya

Mukangayi Robinson Wikana[1*]

Article Information

Received: November 02, 2025
Accepted: February 08, 2026
Published: April 12, 2026

Keywords

Corporate Accountability, Digital Governance, Information Access, Kenya, Social Media Platforms, Transparency By Design

ABSTRACT

The emergence of social media platforms has transformed how corporations disclose information, engage stakeholders, and demonstrate accountability. This study examines how social media platforms shape corporate accountability practices in Kenya through enhanced transparency, real-time communication, and participatory information-sharing. Guided by Stakeholder Theory and the Transparency by Design perspective, the research adopts a mixed-methods approach involving document analysis, interviews with corporate communication officers, and an online survey targeting Kenyan social media users. Results show that social media platforms promote proactive disclosure, accelerate corporate responsiveness, and strengthen oversight from consumers, civil society, and regulators. However, challenges persist, including selective disclosure, misinformation risks, inadequate regulatory frameworks, and varying digital literacy levels. The study concludes that while social media has become a powerful accountability infrastructure, its effectiveness depends on corporate culture, platform governance, and stakeholder empowerment. Recommendations include strengthening digital transparency policies, improving corporate social media governance, and developing national guidelines for responsible online disclosure.

INTRODUCTION

The convergence of digital technologies and corporate governance has reshaped the way organizations communicate, release information and interact with their stakeholders. With the advent of digital transformation in global business environments, social media has become an important instrument to become more transparent and accountable in corporate governance settings (Bonson & Flores, 2011; Kaptein & Van Tulder, 2021). Traditionally, transparency was achieved through annual reports, press conferences, and regulatory disclosures; today, it is implemented through publicly available real-time, interactive digital applications and websites.

The mobile internet penetration, which has been fast rising in Kenya, and the increased application of the social networking applications has greatly impacted corporate communication. The Communications Authority of Kenya (2023) states that mobile internet penetration is over 64 percent, and corporations have an unparalleled access to the arena of publicity. This digital ecosystem has established platforms like Facebook, X (previously Twitter), LinkedIn, and Instagram as the requisite avenues by which organizations share information on operations, crisis response, and two-way communication with the consumers, regulators, and the civil society.

Empirical data has shown that adoption of social media contributes to transparency within the corporate sector, specifically, it increases the frequency, accessibility, and openness of disclosure (Saxton & Guo, 2014; Ettredge *et al.,* 2002). In the corporate environment in Kenya, the telecommunications, banking, energy, hospitality, education, insurance, and retail sectors have adopted the use of social media in their communication efforts in an effort to build stakeholder trust and reputational capital (Were, Omwenga & Mutoro, 2022). These platforms serve as digital transparency systems, where corporations can provide real-time information about performance, service downtimes, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and regulatory compliance initiatives.

Transparency by Design is a concept that focuses on the principles of transparency in digital communication systems design. This framework is inspired by digital governance and information ethics, which it states that transparency must not be a second thought concept but it must be a deliberate part of the design of the system making it traceable, disclosed publicly, and open (Florini, 2007; Meijer, 2013). Practically, it implies that social media algorithms and interfaces, as well as engagement mechanisms, are not only determining what corporations are disclosing, but also how stakeholders perceive and react to such disclosures.

Within Kenya, numerous companies embrace social media as a proactive way of showing accountability particularly in areas where there is a lot of scrutiny by the people. As an example: Telecommunications companies like Safaricom PLC are often active on X and Facebook in terms of service updates, financial milestones, network outages, and corrective actions as part of their transparency commitments (Safaricom Annual Report, 2023). Banks such as Equity Bank and KCB share new

[1] Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya
[*] Corresponding author's e-mail: rmukangayi@mmust.ac.ke

charges, address customer complaints, explain changes in policies and share audited financial statements over social media. Companies operating in the energy sector (e.g., Kenya Power) can use platforms such as X to inform the public about upcoming electrical outages, emergency interruptions, and operational issues, thereby improving the transparency of procedures (KPLC, 2022).

Such practices are in line with the research that the digital disclosure helps lower information asymmetry between corporations and people (Healy and Palepu, 2001) and enhances the accountability norms by making stakeholders monitor and provide feedback about the practices (Fung, 2013).

Horizontal transparency is also made possible by social media, through which stakeholders publicly challenge corporate decisions, seek clarifications, and hold firms accountable through digital activism and online mobilization (Velasco, 2020). Consumer campaigns like #SwitchOffKPLC, #BoycottKenyanBanks, and #MyDressMyChoice, in Kenya, are examples of how social media generates participatory accountability platforms that compel corporations to accept and rectify complaints and wrongdoings.

In such a way, the Kenyan business context demonstrates that the social media is not just a mode of communication but a mechanism of governance that influences transparency practices. The social media sites assist in changing the standards of corporate responsibility in line with the Transparency by Design through their ability to increase information openness, engage stakeholders, and monitor information in real-time.

Problem Statement

Despite the rapid adoption of the social media platform by corporations in Kenya, little is known academically about the impact of such platforms in either encouraging or restricting corporate accountability. The existing data reveal that many organizations utilize social media mostly as a branding and marketing tool rather than a transparency disclosure, ethical communication, and meaningful stakeholder engagement tool (Marete & Murumba, 2021; Ngigi & Were, 2020). Although platforms, such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, and YouTube, offer interactive space, through which the stakeholders may demand information, criticize corporate operations, and monitor organizational behaviour in real-time, majority of Kenyan companies have not integrated such affordances into their accountability systems (Otieno & Omwanga, 2022).

The absence of a detailed regulatory framework on digital transparency and corporate communication is the primary risk. The existing corporate governance instruments in Kenya like the Code of Corporate Governance (2015) of the Capital Markets Authority and the Companies Act (2015) include general requirements on disclosure and do not mention online platforms, digital reporting, or online-based accountability tools (Mwangi, 2021). Thus, there is a lot of leniencies among corporations in regard to what to share on internet and how to package and when to make public attention. This regulatory grey area negatively affects the potential of social media to evolve into a regular practice of transparency and exposes the concerned parties to the selective disclosure of information or impression management (Kaptein, 2022). Secondly, the position of social media in the Kenyan corporate responsibility is not actively researched. Despite the available global literature that highlights the importance of social media in improving the transparency of organizations, promoting participatory governance, and tracking the stakeholders (Feng, Chen, and He, 2019; Etter, Ravasi, and Colleoni, 2019), the effects of these dynamics on the Kenyan corporate environment were not empirically observed. Kenyan studies conducted so far are primarily concerned with digital marketing adoption, internet consumer behavior, or brand management and there is an existing knowledge gap regarding the outcomes of transparency and governance (Marete and Murumba, 2021; Omondi, 2020).

Lack of systematic investigation complicates the conclusion of whether the social media platforms can indeed raise the level of information access, facilitate stakeholder surveillance, or merely are the control means of the corporate image. Consequently, there is insufficiency of knowledge about the involvement of social media practices in shaping corporate governance standards, the extent to which individuals engage in social media, and how they affect the accountability procedures in the Kenyan public and private space. This study seals this loophole by taking into account the influence of the social media platforms on the corporate accountability practices in regards to access to information, stakeholder monitoring, and their involvement in the activities, as guided by the Kenyan socio-corporate and regulatory environment.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

To examine how social media platforms shape corporate accountability practices in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on stakeholder theory:

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory posits that corporations are accountable not only to shareholders but also to customers, employees, communities, and the general public. Social media expands the voice of these stakeholders, providing accessible channels for expressing expectations, complaints, and feedback. This creates pressure for corporations to maintain transparency and respond to stakeholder concerns.

Empirical Review

Social Media and Corporate Transparency

Research in different parts of the world has always shown that digital platforms and social media technologies have changed how organizations interact with their stakeholders through transparency, disclosure, and accountability, among others. Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, as well as YouTube, allow organizations to share corporate decisions, financial results, and data on crisis-related information in real-time and mitigate the information asymmetry between firms and its stakeholders (Etter, Ravasi, & Colleoni, 2019,& Zhang & Luo, 2022). The urgency of updates enables institutions to offer quick clarifications, respond to new challenges as they emerge and be operationally responsible and this increases perceptions of transparency and trustworthiness. IT-wise these platforms can be considered as lightweight distributed information systems, which can support organizational communication workflows, which may be very critical, without using complex enterprise systems. Empirical studies also indicate that timely, accurate, and interactive online disclosures can help to contain reputational losses in times of corporate crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2015).

The spread of social media technologies in developing regions has enhanced more access to corporate information through further democratisation. As seen in studies in Asia and Latin America, the platforms bypass the gatekeepers of conventional media, which allows the equitable dispersion of information and the engagement of stakeholders (Liu & Bakici, 2019). Nevertheless, the level of transparency achieved by the existence of such systems is different depending on the type of industry, organizational culture and ownership. It is more probable that firms that have strong governance structures will embrace social media as a means of transparency and accountability, and in most cases, organizations in an industry that is loosely regulated will use social media as a promotional tool (Khatri & Samuel, 2021).

According to Setiady, (2025) on Corporate Responsibility and Ethical Conduct in the Era of Social Media, the social media increases the speed of information and public engagement that can enhance corporate accountability and ethics by making stakeholders more prone to multiple and more varied corporate disclosures. Moreover, the existing data on the application of social media in organizations shows that online tools define the patterns of internal and external communication that can foster transparency in the case firms embrace the ethics of communication and actively interact with the stakeholders on the Internet (Setiady, 2025).

According to Alshami and Alawi, (2024) the Effect of Social Media on the Organizational commitment among Employees within the Communication sector, it is revealed that social media tools affect organizational commitment among employees in terms of engagement and communication behavior within firms, which has implications on transparency in terms of inside and outside the organization. Even though the current work involves organizational commitment as its topic of interest, instead of corporate transparency per se, the study emphasizes the communicative affordances of social media in modifying corporate culture and the perceptions of its stakeholders, without which transparency practices cannot be grounded. Furthermore, Ahmed, (2025) in a study on Big Data and ESG Reporting in Finance reinforces the idea that digital technologies can promote transparency in sustainability reporting by making data more accurate and real-time disclosed, since transparency in the digital era is more and more dependent on the combination of sophisticated tools and communication strategies. Combined, these pieces of work imply that social media and digital communication technologies can help change the demands towards corporate transparency, but only under the condition they are used ethically and combined with appropriate governance frameworks.

Social media in Africa has become a high-profile corporate communication and governance system, which serves as a cheap, scalable IT infrastructure to distribute information. In South Africa and Nigeria, the studies show that digital platforms facilitate corporate transparency by allowing the stakeholders to inspect the operations, track the organizational performance, and participate in participatory oversight (Maree and Potgieter, 2021; Adebayo and Ayeni, 2020). As an illustration, it is observed that companies that disclose information on the governance active in Nigeria online have much stakeholder engagement, implying that social media may serve as an addition to formal governance systems (Ogbemi & Ajao, 2021).

However, there are still a number of drawbacks that exist in the African situations. The non-uniformity and poor quality of online reporting is deterred by weak regulatory landscapes, incompleteness in digital transformation policies, and non-uniformity in enforcing corporate governance guidelines (Asongu *et al.,* 2018). There is also a tendency of the companies to use the communicative potential of digital platforms to shape the narrative instead of ensuring real transparency, which makes it difficult to match the use of social media with the formal goals of accountability (Chinwah & Braima, 2020).

In Kenya, though, corporate use of social media is on the increase, majority of organizations are using these media with the main intent of marketing and interacting with customers, and not to provide transparency or governance. Research findings by Marete and Murumba (2021) also show that Kenyan companies focus on brand presence and customer satisfaction and little on digital disclosure of governance practices. Likewise, as reported by Otieno and Omwanga (2022), the online expression of corporate information is frequently motivated by the goals of PR and not by accountability thus exhibiting the selective disclosure patterns. Albeit the general principles of disclosure as provided by the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) Code of Corporate Governance (2015), there is no specific direction on digital transparency that would result in uneven practices of both public and private organizations (Mwangi, 2021).

Besides, lack of equal access to technology and digital literacy also limits the prospects of the social media in promoting corporate accountability in Kenya. The more digitally literate citizens have more access to the internet, and they can be more welcomed into the sphere of oversight activities digitally, leaving less digitally literate populations isolated (Nyang'au, 2020). This digital divide highlights that the benefits of digital transparency are technologically and socio-economically mediated by the need to consider information system accessibility and user capability in the process of designing technological-based governance interventions.

Challenges in Digital Accountability

Regardless of the revolutionary nature of social media, organizations have a number of challenges in using the media to gain credible and consistent accountability.

Selective Disclosure and PR-driven Transparency

A considerable number of companies use social media to send curated messages that are aimed at enhancing a good company image. Research around the world indicates that companies are usually hesitant to reveal sensitive or negative news on social media, which results in selective disclosure (Kaptein, 2022). This trend is prevalent in the sectors of Africa where the regulatory enforcing is low (Maree & Potgieter, 2021).

Spread of Misinformation

Social media can be subject to misinformation, rumors, and untested information by the virtue of its interactive and fast-paced nature. According to Coombs and Holladay (2015), the misinformation in crises may rapidly lead to reputation losses when organizations fail to act in a timely and honest manner. There are also cases of viral misinformation in the Kenyan corporations that affect the perception of the population and motivation to trust (Omondi, 2020).

Lack of Institutional Guidelines

The major part of the African states, Kenya included, do not have the broad digital reporting standards. As noted by Mwangi (2021), in Kenya, corporate governance frameworks fail to incorporate the social media disclosure expectations, and online disclosure is voluntary. This lack of instructions dilutes data consistency and transparency to the community.

Digital Literacy Gaps

Digital accountability requires the stakeholders to be able to utilize online platforms. In most of the developing nations, discrepancies between digital literacy restrict meaningful engagement (Asongu *et al.,* 2018). In Kenya, internet access and digital illiteracy disparities between rural and urban areas decrease fair supervision of corporations through social media (Nyang'au, 2020).

Reputational Risks and Viral Negative Content

This is because bad publicity may spread very fast due to the pace of information. Viral criticism, boycotting, whistleblower leaks are reputational threats that can easily make organizations reluctant to post sensitive data online (Zhang & Luo, 2022).

Generally, even though research recognizes these challenges, not many Kenyan researchers have explored them in a combined fashion. Available studies are still scattered throughout in areas of marketing, ICT adoption, and governance literature with a definite gap that this study aims to address.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The research design adopted in this study was the explanatory sequential approach, which is a mixed-methods research, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research, aimed at gaining a full picture of how social media influences social media practices in corporate accountability in Kenya. Mixed-methods research is especially applicable to the emerging and complicated social phenomena since it allows combining the numerical patterns with detailed contextual explanations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative surveys were used to get general stakeholder views of social media transparency whereas qualitative interviews were carried out to give detailed accounts of corporate communication officers on organizational practices and processes of decision making. Such methodological triangulation will improve validity, reduce bias, and offer a more profound insight into corporate transparency in online spaces (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Target Population

The focus of the study was on transparency and accountability, resulting in the target population being composed of two main groups, whose opinions are at the centre of study:

1. Corporate communication officers of the large Kenyan corporations of various sectors, such as telecommunications, banking, transportation, energy, and retail. These officials were picked as such they are the direct implementers of digital communication policies, disclosure policies, and reactionary policies towards online stakeholders.
2. The active social media population in Kenya that falls within the age brackets of 18 and above that is attracted to social media platforms like Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, and LinkedIn. This group demonstrates the greater population that consumes business material, observes organisational actions and discussions on accountability on the internet.

By focusing on corporate actors and public users simultaneously, it is possible to have a multi-stakeholder approach that is critical to comprehending accountability structures (Bryman, 2016).

Sampling Procedure

Purposive and stratified random sampling was used.

Purposive sampling was used to select corporate communication officers since they are the persons who have the expertise of digital communication and transparency of corporations. Their knowledge on how to run official social media accounts qualifies them to be critical informants in the behavior of organizational disclosure.

In the case of the social media users, stratified random sampling ensured the representation of the major regions of Kenya, namely, Nairobi, Coast, Western, Rift Valley, Eastern, Nyanza, and Central. This sampling technique enhances the external validity of the findings because it guarantees the presence of variety in the demographics of users, their engagement patterns, and digital literacy rates (Etikan & Bala, 2017). The stratification was acceptable because of the regional differences in internet penetration and patterns in the use of social media as indicated by the Kenyan ICT statistics.

Sample Size

One hundred and fifty social media users and twenty corporate communication officers were involved in the research.

The number of social media users was suitable to conduct the research based on the survey, where the number of 100-150 participants or more is deemed sufficient to engage in statistical analysis (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

The 20 communication officers' sample is supported by qualitative standards of interviews, and, in fact, the recommendations suggest 10 to 30 interviewees to give detailed and context-based information (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020). The chosen size was saturating but still provided the representation of various sectors.

Data Collection Methods

Three methods of data collection were applied:

Social Media User Questionnaires

Online questionnaires were also used to capture the perceptions of the users to corporate transparency, the experience of users to accessing information, and access to corporate accounts. Questionnaires can be successfully used to collect large quantitative data and minimize the bias of the interviewer (Fink, 2017).

Corporate Communication Officer Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

The semi-structured interviews were very informative in the way organizations plan and execute their social media communication strategies. Key informant interviews are useful in the comprehension of the complicated processes and managerial decision-making (Patton, 2015).

Document Analysis

The analysis of documents involved the analysis of posts on social media of corporations, digital reports, statements of the corporation, and their interactions with users. Document analysis enables the researcher to study actual practices of disclosure and not just the information that is self-reported (Bowen, 2009). The approach helped to increase the validity of results because it facilitated cross-verification (triangulation).

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative Analysis

Questionnaire results were analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard-deviations) which allowed summarizing the views of users on corporate transparency.

Also, the regression analysis was performed to investigate how the use of social media platforms (independent variable) is predictive of the perceived corporate transparency and accountability (dependent variable). The regression analysis will suit the evaluation of causal trends and statistical significance (Field, 2018).

Qualitative Analysis

The thematic analysis was employed to analyze qualitative data collected in the form of interviews and conducted in accordance with the six-step model of Braun and Clarke (2006). The method is ideal in determining trends, significances, and meanings associated with the transparency practices in digital communication. Inductively and deductively, the themes like the selective disclosure, stakeholder engagement, crisis communication, and the online monitoring were obtained. Thematic analysis supplements the richness of knowledge about contextual matters that quantitative techniques are not able to point out.

Such an approach to quantitative analysis, coupled with a qualitative one, enhances the rigor of the methodology of the research and makes the study complete and thorough in its comprehension of the role of social media in corporate accountability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Transparency Enhancement

The results have indicated that social media sites have radically altered the practices of corporate accountability in Kenya, where 82 per cent of the respondents reported that social media made access to corporate information to be faster. In addition to increasing the speed of information flow, the study demonstrates that social media has made accountability as a continuity and event-based process as opposed to a periodic, compliance-based exercise. Kenyan companies are more and more using services like Twitter (X), Facebook, LinkedIn to share financial achievements, corporate responsibility efforts, service outages and warnings to customers, making accountability essentially a part of the normal corporate messaging. This real-time disclosure is consistent with the global findings that digital interactivity decreases information asymmetry between corporations and stakeholders (Feng *et al.,* 2019; Bonson & Ratkai, 2021), yet in the Kenyan one, it also serves as a solution to the perceived delays in the traditional reporting and regulatory feedback processes.

Uniqueness of this study is that the timeliness does not suffice to ensure stakeholder trust. Respondents stressed that when the disclosures are regular, checked and followed with clarification, the transparency is enhanced. This reinforces the Transparency by Design concept, in which visibility and traceability are not an afterthought in corporate action but its constituents (Kaptein, 2022). Nevertheless, the research goes ahead to expound this by showing how stakeholder trust in Kenya is highly determined by perceived authenticity especially during a crisis situation. Companies which disclosed false information and admitted their services, or gave clarifying information, were considered more responsible than those who simply issued refined statements. This implies that in Kenya responsibility is being judged more on the basis of relational credibility and not formal completeness of disclosure.

The results also show that Kenyan corporations vary greatly in the practice of transparency as they are also characterized by different orientations towards social media accountability. Whereas certain organizations give comprehensive and balanced disclosures, others are selective in their transparency disclosure, in that they focus on the positive performance of their organizations without commenting on controversial aspects of their operations. Whereas selective disclosure aligns with patterns of the existing African studies on corporate communication (Akaranga & Makau, 2019), the research is the first to find that stakeholders are increasingly critical of the versioned narratives, particularly when differences arise across platforms or when third parties subject corporate narratives to scrutiny. This has caused selective transparency to be very likely to lead to increased scrutiny instead of reputational safeguarding.

The other significant and unique observation is the introduction of social media users as informal accountability agents. The results indicate that popular responses, in the form of comments, reposts, hashtags and online activism, often force Kenyan corporates to make statements, apologize or take corrective action faster than by the conventional governance mechanisms. This type of citizen/consumer accountability puts citizens and consumers in quasi-regulatory positions especially in areas of telecommunication, banking and transport where service disruption is very tangible. Accountability in Kenya is becoming more and more socially enforced, transforming power relations between corporations and stakeholders unlike in more regulated global settings where institutional oversight prevails.

Nonetheless, defensive accountability practices are another unintended consequence of increased online scrutiny which is also found in the study. Corporations may limit disclosure in crisis situations, respond slowly or provide comment facilities as ways of dealing with reputational risk. Although such defensive tactics have been reported in other parts of the world (Bonson & Ratkai, 2021), the situation is different in Kenya since defensive communication is usually accompanied by public calls of transparency, which puts openness and image management in conflict. This strain destroys the long-term trust and supports the idea of symbolic, not substantive responsibility.

Generally, the results indicate that the social media platforms have broadened the scope, pace, and the participants behind the corporate accountability in Kenya. However, the results of accountability are not only determined by the access to information but also by the way corporations interact, react, and adjust to the act of scrutiny. Social media is thus a transparency tool, reputational management mechanism and space of informal governance at the same time. This doubled identity highlights the fact that as much as the social media increases corporate accountability, it does not necessarily lead to wholesome transparency; instead, it rearranges accountability as a negotiated, dynamic, and social process within the digital realm of the Kenyan populace.

Engagement and Accountability of Stakeholders

The results show that there is a strong positive correlation between the stakeholder engagement on the social media platforms and corporate accountability practices in Kenya. As respondents always reported, visible organizational responses are often provoked by social interactions that occur with the company, especially on the company social media pages through complaints, questions, and criticisms. Such responses involve the implementation of correctional measures, giving of public apologies, demystifying of disputed facts and in some instances altering services or operational procedures. In contrast to the private avenues of complaint, the social media interactions were seen as more likely to lead to corporate action since the issue may never be resolved and the attention of more people continues to be focused on the post.

Qualitative data of corporate communication officers indicate that visibility and virality are the key mechanisms, whereby accountability is imposed. According to one of the respondents, management is largely aligned on the issue as it begins to attract comments and shares; in other words, it would have been prioritized had the issue been raised offline. This observation implies that responsibility in the Kenyan business society is becoming more of a response to social online pressure, and not entirely motivated by corporate governance rules. This point expands on international literature that claims that social media can turn stakeholders into non-active receivers of information into active agents of accountability (Morsing & Schultz, 2020; Valentini, 2021) by showing that the magnitude and strength of online attention have a direct impact on managers.

The paper also indicates that social media has enhanced procedural accountability, which forces corporations to become more responsive in relation to stakeholder interests and to be more open in the way they do it.

Communication officers of the corporations pointed out that the lack of response usually compounds the criticism and slur the organizational reputation. Consequently, most companies have resorted to internal escalation systems either in the form of rapid response teams or approval hierarchies so that they can engage in time. This is a change in bureaucratic decision-making to time-sensitive accountability, responsiveness is considered as one of the evidence of the integrity of an organization. Although they have recorded the similar trends in the world, the Kenyan case has shown that it is more sensitive to the response time considering the pace at which online opinion mobilizations can occur.

In line with the Stakeholder Theory, the results depict that Kenyan companies are more of the view that accountability is not only to shareholders, but also to customers, communities, and the populace (Freeman, 1984). Engaged stakeholders utilize social media to regularly seek clarifications, challenge corporate discourses and exert collective pressure by coordinated comments, hashtags and tagging of regulators or media houses. This is similar to research done in South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana on digital citizen oversight (Osei-Tutu and Owusu, 2021), except that the present study goes a step further to demonstrate that Kenyan stakeholders usually circumvent any formal complaint approach altogether, resorting to social media as a point of first resort when it comes to accountability.

One of the specific results of the research is that emotional tone and narrative framing have a significant effect on corporate responses. The respondents noted that any post based on the theme of fairness, service failure, or social justice issues would receive more timely and conciliatory responses than any technical or policy-based criticism. This implies that being accountable is not determined by the legitimacy of claims but also by how claims appeal to popular feelings. As a result, there are corporations who are tactical in making symbolic moves like publicly repenting or sending expressive messages and without always taking structural action. This shows a conflict between the substantive and the performative accountability in which responsiveness is at times applied to control the perception of the masses instead of bringing about a change in the long term.

The outcomes also indicate that social media has assisted in democratization of corporate governance in Kenya by reducing the obstacles to entry and facilitating two-way communication between corporations and stakeholders. Conventional media sources tend to sift or postpone those issues of concern among the people, and in social media, those issues can be scrutinized and can have a direct contact with corporate actors. Yet, the process of such democratization is not even, as corporations still have a great influence on moderation, framing of narratives, and selective interaction. In that regard, although social media boosts transparency and engagement, it does not completely eradicate power inequality in the accountability framework of corporations.

In general, this paper shows that social media networks in Kenya serve as informal accountability institutions and supplementary (and sometimes alternative) regulatory institutions. They strengthen the voice of stakeholders, speed up organizational responsiveness and redefine the anticipations of corporate behavior. Nonetheless, the success of such digital responsibility will still depend on the long-term stakeholder interest, the corporate interest in going beyond any empty steps, and introducing online accountability into the internal governance mechanisms. These conclusions support the rationale that one should not see social media as a simple communication platform but as a paradigm shift in modern corporate accountability practice in the emerging economies.

Challenges Identified

This research found that although social media platforms have increased the opportunities of transparency and stakeholder interactions, a number of interdependent problems go a long way to limit effective corporate accountability in Kenya. These issues are not operational in nature only but quite grounded in reputational issues, regulatory ambiguity, institutional capacity constraints, which collectively constitute how corporations communicate and disclose information on the internet.

Fear of Reputational Damage

The qualitative evidence shows that the fear of reputation damage is the strongest limitation that affects corporate conduct in social media. According to corporate communication officers, negative posts, complaints by customers, or activism may quickly get viral, which may be hard to control by an organisation. One of the respondents said that one bad tweet can ruin years of brand building in a few hours. Because of this, a lot of companies resort to defensive communication tactics, including taking their time to respond, turning comment boxes off during times of crisis, or making their statements extremely diplomatic without a clear acceptance or rejection of the fact of accountability.

Although this observation fits the literature on crisis communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2015), the situation in Kenyon presents a unique result: accountability is not proactive but reactive. Companies will tend to act in response to increasing demands of the society than proactively reveal problems that arise within them. This is unlike in more regulated settings where most of the time early disclosure is encouraged or required. In Kenya, social media, therefore, operates as a risk-containing space as opposed to a comprehensive transparency accountability space.

Selective Disclosure and Strategic Ambiguity

The authors also discovered that there was extensive application of strategic ambiguity in company social media disclosure. According to the qualitative interviews, companies intentionally use ambiguous language, positive framing, or selective disclosure in order to keep people moving forward and reduce the amount of criticism directed at the company. As an example, service interruptions would be characterized as temporary technical coordination with no timeframes and reasons, whereas the success of CSR would be promoted through visuals and regular updates.

It is a trend that replicates the methods of impression management observed in other international literature (Merkl-Davies and Brennan, 2017), yet the results indicate that social media enhances narrative control by allowing corporations to avoid established reporting lines. Notably, respondents have admitted that these practices can corrupt trust in the long run, as stakeholders will become more inclined to compare corporate claims with lived experiences provided online to match them. This implies that there isn't transparency on platforms created to create transparency because symbolic accountability which is a product of transparency is created through platforms that create transparency.

Uncertainties in Regulations and Disjointed Supervision

The other important conclusion is the importance of regulatory uncertainty in accountability practices. The participants repeatedly reported that there were no clear guidelines on the use of social media in disclosing corporate information in Kenya. Although the timeliness, content and responsibility of disclosure in the digital format are not explicitly structured, the absence of standards by the institutions of the Capital Markets Authority and Communications Authority by which to regulate the overall corporate behavior adds ambiguity.

This regulatory loophole promotes self-regulation thus causing inconsistent accountability practices amongst corporations. As opposed to the developed economy where digital disclosures are often adjusted in line with formal reporting standards, Kenyan companies exist in a loose environment whereby compliance with the conventional rules is considered, and social media is regarded as an informal environment. This confirms results of other developing economies (Samaratunge & Alam, 2021).) but goes farther to show that regulatory ambiguity enables social media accountability to develop disproportionately based on the organizational culture and risk-taking behavior.

Lack of Ability to Handle Large Online Contacts

A limitation to accountability also revealed institutional capacity limitation as a major challenge in the study. The problem is that many corporations do not have special departments of digital communication or high-tech monitoring systems to coordinate a large number of online interactions. The respondents complained that they felt overwhelmed by the magnitude and urgency of stakeholder responses, which led to slower responses, lack of response to complaints, and uneven interactions.

There is qualitative evidence that the stakeholders view delayed responses as avoidance or indifference which negatively affects the trust and corporate legitimacy. The same conclusion is consistent with Valentini (2021) but has an additional contextual dimension: in Kenya, the key accountability cue has been responsiveness since social media users anticipate quick reactions. Companies that fail to deliver on these expectations are likely to suffer reputational losses irrespective of whether their disclosures are accurate and/or quality.

Overally, these results suggest that there is a complex interaction between reputational risk, strategic communication, weak regulatory clarity and limited institutional capacity that contributes to social media-driven corporate accountability in Kenya. Social media in Kenya is being used as a contentious accountability space, unlike in the global environment where it augments existing accountability frameworks, and corporations weigh transparency against survival in unstable digital environments.

The brings a new empirical understanding of the issue under consideration in the sense that it proves that, in Kenya, corporate responsibilities on the social media are negotiated, selective, and strongly contextual, as opposed to being standardized or rule-based. Although social media makes the organization more visible and subject to external examination, that does not necessarily lead to greater transparency. Rather, the results of accountability rest on the process of corporate risk interpretation, stakeholder engagements and regulatory uncertainties.

The implications of these findings include the necessity to have more explicit digital disclosure policies, invest in digital communications capacity, and practice more participatory than defensive accountability in case social media achieves its potential as a governance tool in Kenya.

CONCLUSIONS

The research finds that social media has emerged as a major and rapidly growing influence shaping corporate responsibility in Kenya. Its interactivity and real time quality improves transparency, stakeholder interaction and on-going disclosure where accountability is no longer held at the end of the period reporting but rather on day-to-day corporate communication. Stakeholders have become active observers and participants in the observation of corporate behavior. Nevertheless, selective disclosure, ineffective regulatory frameworks, limited institutional capacity, and reputational risk make the use of social media as an accountability tool limited. Such weaknesses promote defensive communication and impression management, in other words, elevated visibility does not necessarily imply true accountability. On the whole, even though the role of social media has become a normal aspect of the corporate accountability system in Kenya, its transformational influence requires corporate readiness to become transparent, effective implementation of digital communication technologies, and the availability of favorable regulatory frameworks.

Recommendations

Corporations can employ transparency-by-design strategies through entrenching accountability into digital communication frameworks, such as specific digital governance teams and computer-based disclosure monitoring tools. Regulators like CMA and CAK ought to set out distinct standards of digital disclosure, and assimilate technology-based surveillance in the corporate governance codes to guarantee real-time compliance. Moreover, digital literacy programs and evidence-based monitoring instruments should enable the stakeholders to critically consider the corporate disclosures to enhance the participatory and technology-enabled forms of accountability.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, W. (2025). Big Data and ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) reporting in finance. *American Journal of Economics and Business Innovation, 4*(3), 125–133. https://doi.org/10.54536/ajebi.v4i3.6055

Akaranga, S., & Makau, B. (2019). Ethical considerations and transparency issues in corporate communication in East Africa. *African Journal of Business Ethics, 13*(1), 25–38.

Alshami, M. M. A., & Alawi, N. A. M. (2024). The effect of social media on employees' organizational commitment in the communication sector. *American Journal of Economics and Business Innovation, 3*(1), 118–124. https://doi.org/10.54536/ajebi.v3i1.2532

Bonsón, E., & Flores, F. (2011). Social media and corporate transparency: The case of Spanish listed companies. *Journal of Information Systems, 25*(1), 97–116.

Bonsón, E., & Ratkai, M. (2021). A set of metrics to assess stakeholder engagement and social media transparency. *Online Information Review, 45*(3), 543–561.

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal, 9*(2), 27–40.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Communications Authority of Kenya. (2023). First Quarter Sector Statistics Report 2023/2024. Nairobi: CAK.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. (2015). Social media and crisis communication: Expanding stakeholder engagement and reputation management. *Public Relations Review, 41*(5), 747–752.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.

Etikan, I., & Bala, K. (2017). Sampling and sampling methods. *Biometrics & Biostatistics International Journal, 5*(6), 1–3.

Etter, M., Ravasi, D., & Colleoni, E. (2019). Social media and the formation of organizational reputation. *Academy of Management Review, 44*(1), 28–52.

Ettredge, M., Richardson, V. J., & Scholz, S. (2002). Dissemination of information for investors on corporate websites. *Journal of Accounting and Public Policy, 21*(4–5), 357–369.

Feng, Y., Chen, H., & He, L. (2019). Corporate social media: Understanding communication strategies on social networking sites. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal, 24*(1), 104–118.

Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using SPSS* (5th ed.). Sage.

Fink, A. (2017). *How to conduct surveys: A step-by-step guide* (6th ed.). Sage.

Florini, A. (2007). The Right to Know: Transparency for an Open World. Columbia University Press.

Freeman, R. E. (1984). Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach. Boston: Pitman.

Fung, A. (2013). Infotopia: Unleashing the democratic power of transparency. *Politics & Society, 41*(2), 183–212.

Guest, G., Namey, E., & Chen, M. (2020). A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in qualitative research. *PLOS ONE, 15*(5), e0232076.

Healy, P. M., & Palepu, K. G. (2001). Information asymmetry, corporate disclosure, and the capital markets. *Journal of Accounting and Economics, 31*(1–3), 405–440.

Kaptein, M. (2022). Transparency in business: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Business Ethics, 176*(4), 703–720.

Kaptein, M. (2022). Transparency in business: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Business Ethics, 176*(4), 703–720.

Kaptein, M. (Year). Title on transparency or corporate ethics. *Journal.*

Kaptein, M., & Van Tulder, R. (2021). Toward a framework for corporate social transparency. *Business & Society, 60*(2), 293–334.

KPLC. (2022). Annual Report and Financial Statements. Nairobi: Kenya Power and Lighting Company.

Marete, P., & Murumba, P. (2021). Social media adoption and organizational performance among Kenyan corporations. *African Journal of Business Management, 15*(7), 188–198.

Meijer, A. (2013). Understanding the complex dynamics of transparency. *Public Administration Review, 73(*1), 429–439.

Merkl-Davies, D., & Brennan, N. (2017). Impression management and selective transparency in corporate narrative disclosures. *Accounting and Business Research, 47*(5), 565–604.

Morsing, M., & Schultz, F. (2020). Stakeholder communication strategies in the digital age. *Business & Society, 59*(1), 3–32.

Mwangi, J. (2021). Corporate governance practices and digital transparency in Kenya. *Journal of African Governance, 6(*2), 55–70.

Ngigi, M., & Were, S. (2020). Social media use and communication strategies among firms in Kenya. *International Journal of Communication and Public Relations, 2*(1), 1–14.

OECD. (Year). Corporate Governance and Digital Transparency Report.

Omondi, S. (2020). Digital marketing strategies and brand visibility among Kenyan organizations. *Journal of Marketing and Communication Studies, 4*(3), 15–27.

Osei-Tutu, E., & Owusu, F. (2021). Social media and corporate accountability in Africa: Opportunities and limitations. *African Journal of Governance, 6*(1), 71–90.

Other relevant Kenyan corporate governance and ICT policy documents.

Otieno, A., & Omwanga, D. (2022). Social media engagement and corporate communication in Kenya. *Public Relations Journal of East Africa, 5*(1), 22–34.*

Palinkas, L. A., *et al.* (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health, 42*(5), 533–544.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage.

Safaricom PLC. (2023). *Annual Integrated Report*. Nairobi: Safaricom.

Samaratunge, R., & Alam, Q. (2021). Accountability and transparency in emerging countries: Governance, democratic currents and change. *Public Administration and Development, 41*(4), 147-156.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research methods for business students* (8th ed.). Pearson.

Saxton, G. D., & Guo, C. (2014). Online stakeholder targeting and the acquisition of social media capital. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing, 19*(4), 268–278.

Setiady, J. (2025). Corporate responsibility and ethical conduct in the era of social media. *American Journal of Economic and Management Business, 4*(9). https://doi.org/10.58631/ajemb.v4i9.333

Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (2010). *Mixed methods in social & behavioral research* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Valentini, C. (2021). Digital communication and stakeholder relations: Understanding responsiveness and engagement. *Journal of Communication Management, 25*(4), 373–388.

Velasco, J. (2020). Social media and the new public accountability. *Journal of Digital Social Research, 2*(1), 1–23.

Were, R., Omwenga, E., & Mutoro, H. (2022). The use of social media for corporate communication among Kenyan firms. *African Journal of Business and Management, 8*(3), 55–68.

Zaharia, R., & Bîră, A. (2021). Corporate transparency in the digital era: The role of social media. *Information & Management, 58*(6), 103–138.