

Use of Whatsapp Messaging in Enhancing Public Participation in the Budgeting Process: A study of Migori County Government

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Abstract

Globally, the use of Whatsapp messaging has gained power. Just like many social media platforms, Whatsapp provides a platform for instantaneous sharing of information. Many people in Migori County have not been able to participate in the county budgeting process because of ineffective communication channel. The purpose of the study was to design a feasible Whatsapp messaging adoption model which can be used by Migori county government to enhance public participation in budgeting process. The objective of this study was to examine the use of Whatsapp messaging in enhancing public participation in budgeting process. This study used a survey design because it involved exploring people's opinion and attitudes towards the use of Whatsapp messaging. It was underpinned on the Technology Acceptance Mode (TAM) and Participatory Development Theory. The study was conducted in Awendo, Rongo and Suna East Sub Counties in Migori County, with a study population of 143,468. A sample size of 399, comprising of 392 individuals drawn from the general public, and 7 county government staff sampled using systematic random and purposive sampling method respectively, participated in the study. Analysis was done through narration and measures of frequencies for qualitative and quantitative data respectively. The researcher did content validity with the assistance of an expert and test-retest to examine the validity and reliability respectively. This study revealed that majority of the respondents proposed the use of WhatsApp messaging for public participation because of its convenience, timely communication, and ease of use. The respondents however indicated that issues of the high cost of bundles, non-inclusivity and poor coordination should be addressed. It was concluded that the county of Migori has not embraced WhatsApp messaging budgeting process. The study recommended the adoption of WhatsApp messaging by Migori County. Use of voice messages is necessary to enhance WhatsApp messaging communication.

Key words: *Adoption Model, WhatsApp messaging, public participation, budget*

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1.0 Introduction

The United Nations and Inter-Parliamentary Union (2012), indicate that modern technology is currently being used globally to enhance public participation. According to Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015), public participation describes the activities by which people's concerns and interests are assimilated into decisions regarding public matters. The voices of the public can only be incorporated when there is a two-way communication that can only be achieved through a proper communication channel.

WhatsApp application which was launched by Brian Acton and Jan Koum in 2009 and was built with the sole aim of replacing Short Messages Service (SMS) by providing additional information to users such as the double tick in blue color option which let users know that the recipient has read their message (Church & Oliveira, 2013), is among technology being used to enhance public participation. The application has the ability to enhance communication within a group of people (Rashid & Aminu, 2014). With a WhatsApp messenger, communication has become easier, faster and cheaper (Yeboah & Ewur 2014).

In the Republic of Paraguay WhatsApp was used to increase participation in the Open Government Partnership Initiative (OGP, 2018). Sixteen online WhatsApp groups were created to increase public participation in the Action plan (OPSI, 2018). The innovation dealt with the problem of lack of communication with marginalized and hard

to reach communities in the rural areas, hence, enabling them to share their ideas. According to Moloji (2018), the government of South Africa is using GovChat WhatsApp to interact with citizen and enable them to report issues, make inquiries and rate services among other features.

Before the promulgation of the 2010 Kenyan constitution, the public participation process was centralized. Currently, government policies and development activities like the budget making process are being done with the involvement of the citizen at the county level. National Council for Law and Reporting (2012) in the Kenyan constitution also gives counties powers to make their own budgets.

A purple, rounded hexagonal box containing a quote in white, italicized text.

“The utilization of WhatsApp messaging is an effective communication tool for enhancing public participation in the budgeting process”

The right of the public to get information is also enshrined in Article 35 of the Kenyan constitution. For the citizen to get proper information and participate in the budget-making process, effective media channels should be employed by the authorities, (The National Assembly of Kenya, 2017). A

survey done by Bloggers Association of Kenya released in the month of February 2018 reveals that about 12 Million Kenyan access WhatsApp. This means that WhatsApp messaging is becoming one of the dominant tools for communication in Kenya. During the preparation of the 2020/2021 budget estimates, county of Nyandarua in Kenya received written memoranda from the members of the public and the civil society groups via WhatsApp. In a public notice published in a Kenyan local daily, the county of Nyandarua provided a list of 25 WhatsApp groups for each ward.

In the financial years 2020/2021, Migori County government did not physically engage the members of the public on budget making process. They instead directed the members of the public to submit written memorandum because of COVID19 pandemic containment measures that prohibited meetings. This brought uproar among a section of the members of the general public who felt that they were locked out of the process and demanded alternative methods of engagement which was never available. This research has answered the questions on how effective WhatsApp messaging is in enhancing public participation process; and factors influencing the adoption of WhatsApp as means of communication during a public participation exercise.

Statement of the problem

Many people in Migori County have not been able to participate in the county budgeting process because of ineffective communication. The county public participation in the budgeting process has

always been done through physical meetings attended by five people from every ward in Migori County. Migori County has 40 wards which mean that only 200 people participate in the exercise in the whole county, hence the budgeting process is not inclusive. Such low public participation will result to poor governance and lack of accountability. Participation of the people is recognized in Article 10 of the Constitution of Kenya as one of the national values and principles of governance. Further Article 174(c) provides that the object of devolution is to enhance the participation of people in the exercise of the powers of the State and in making decisions affecting them. Social media and more particularly WhatsApp has been taunted as a game changer in citizen participation. However, no research has been done on the use of WhatsApp in Public participation budgeting process in Kenya.

The objective of the study

The objective of the study was to examine the use of WhatsApp massaging as a communication tool in public participation in the budget making process.

Research questions

How can WhatsApp messaging be used as a communication tool in public participation in budget-making process?

Overview of literature

Budgeting is a comprehensive and coordinated plan which is packaged by the management of an organization, and expressed in financial terms for the operations and resources of an enterprise for some specific period in the future. In Kenya there are three key legal documents which

guide the budget process; namely, the Constitution, Public Finance Management Act, 2012 and Public Finance Management Regulations. At the county level, the budget making process involved the members of the public, the County Assembly Budget and Appropriation committee, the county Finance and Appropriation department led by the county executive in charge of the finance, the county controller of budget, county auditor general and the county communication department

In Kenya there are three key legal documents which guide the budget process, which include the Constitution, Public Finance Management Act, 2012 and Public Finance Management Regulations. Public participation in budgetary process entails giving the citizen an opportunity to influence the making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of budgetary decisions that touches on their social political and economic wellbeing (Speier, 2009). Kenya Law Reports (2012) mandate county governments to engage citizens in planning and policy making processes.

Education level of the citizenry also has a significant correlation in the level of public participation (John, 2009). Houtzager & Joshi (2012) contends that education has a high positive correlation with public engagement in local governance. The accessibility of social media platforms presents a chance for citizens to interact directly and actively with the system (Chotara, 2012). New mobile and networked communication technologies will facilitate the participatory process (Brabham, 2009). The major features of WhatsApp are the

ability to send text messages, audio notes, videos, location details and files. Hence, the application has the ability to enhance communication within a group of people (Husain & Adamu, 2014).

At the peak of COVID19 in the year 2021, WhatsApp in collaboration with World Health Organization (WHO) launched WhatsApp Coronavirus Information Hub that provided simple actionable guidance to various stakeholders that include the health workers, educators, community leaders and local government among others that rely on WhatsApp to communicate.

2.0 Materials and Methods

This study adopted a survey research design. Literature review was conducted with the intent to gather secondary data. This study employed mixed research method, which involved collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data. The study was conducted in three sub counties in Migori County; namely, Rongo, Awendo and Suna East; which were selected because of the high education level and internet usage among inhabitants. Purposive and systematic random sampling techniques were used in the study to sample county staff key in budgeting process, and the general public as well.

The sub counties have a cumulative population of 143,468 individuals of age 18 years and above. Yamane formula was used to calculate a sample size of 399. 392 questionnaires were administered to main respondents, and all were filled and returned. All the seven key informants who were county government workers were also

interviewed. Hence, the response rate was 100 percent. The validity and reliability of the instrument was established using test-retest method and expert opinion respectively. This research yielded both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data was coded, then entered into Excel and the Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v25) was used for descriptive analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, and presented in narrative form.

3. 0 Results and Discussion

Response rate

The study that targeted 399 respondents had a response rate of 100 percent. All

questionnaires given to 392 respondents were returned, and the seven county government Key Informants interviewed.

Hourly usage of WhatsApp messaging

Establishing the average number of hours an individual in active on Whatsapp was very important in this study for the planning purposes. In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked the number of hours they spent on WhatsApp in a day. Table 1 below summarizes the finding. The researcher inquired the number of hours the respondents spend on WhatsApp per day.

Table 1

Hourly usage of Whatsapp messaging

Number of hours	Frequency	Percentage
1-2hrs	62	15.8
3-5hrs	128	32.7
6-7hrs	104	26.5
over 8hrs	97	24.7
Blank	1	.3
Total	392	100.0

Table 1 shows that 128(32.7%) people spent between 3-5 hours, 104(26.5%) spent 6-7 hours; 97(24.7%) spent over 8 hours; 62(15.8%) spent 1-2 hours on WhatsApp in a day. 1(0.3%) of the respondents did not respond. From the findings, majority of the respondents spend 3-5 hours on WhatsApp in a day. This therefore means that the discussion on WhatsApp is ideal for 3-5 hours. These findings correlate with the finding of a study dubbed “A trend Setter in

Mobile Communication among Chennai Youth” revealed that users spent average 8 hours a day on WhatsApp.

Reasons for using WhatsApp messaging

Reasons why individuals use WhatsApp messaging was core in this study. The respondents were asked the reasons why they use WhatsApp messaging. Table 2 summarizes the findings.

Table 2

Reasons for using WhatsApp messaging by respondents.

Reasons for using WhatsApp messaging	Frequency	Percentage
Ease of communication	102	26.0
Real time messaging	47	12.0
It’s cheaper/cost effectiveness	30	7.7
It’s convenience	157	40.1
Safety of the information	53	13.5
No response	3	.8
Total	392	100.0

Table 2 shows that 157(40.1%), 102(26%), 47(12%);30(7.7%) and 53(13.5%) of the respondents prefer WhatsApp because of its convenience, ease of communication, real time messaging, cost effectiveness, and safety of the information respectively. 3(0.8%) did not respond. The finding reveals

that majority of the respondents 157(40.1%), prefer WhatsApp messaging because it is convenient. Church & Oliveira (2013), in their multi-method study in Spain, found that WhatsApp was commonly adopted for convenience in communication and cost benefits.

Use of WhatsApp for development

At the center of this study was the use of WhatsApp messaging for development. The respondents were presented with a questionnaire bearing specific questions on

the use of WhatsApp messaging for development. The findings of the study is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Respondents on WhatsApp groups created for development

Whether in a WhatsApp group created for development	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	204	52.0
No	183	46.7
No response	5	1.3
Total	392	100.0

As outlined in table 3, 204(52.0%) revealed that they have been in WhatsApp groups created to discuss development issues in Migori County, while 183(46.7%) have not been in such WhatsApp groups. 5 respondents that account for 1.3 percent did not respond. The study revealed that many respondents (52 percent) are already using WhatsApp for development.

Qualitatively, majority of the key informants who participated in the study said they are in WhatsApp groups where issues of development including budget were discussed. During the data mining process, the researcher targeted 7 key informants and at the end of the exercise all the seven responded. The researcher used the tag “W” to refer to the key informants; and therefore in these cases, we have informant W1, W2, W3, W4, W5, W6 and W7.

Respondent W2 said he is in several WhatsApp groups where members of the public discuss development issues including budget. ...*Yes am in several WhatsApp group where issues of development are discussed, beginning from the assembly, we have the elected forum and we have the county assembly forum which contain both the elected and nominated.* According to Saboia (2016), local gym owners in Brazil use WhatsApp to answer clients’ questions and schedule gym visits

Conclusiveness and usefulness of discussion done on WhatsApp

Ascertaining the conclusiveness and usefulness of discussion done on WhatsApp was key in the study. Respondents who have participated in discussion done on WhatsApp

were therefore presented with questions inquiring about the conclusiveness and

usefulness of the discussion. Table 4 summarizes the findings

Table 4

Conclusiveness and usefulness of discussion done on WhatsApp

Whether discussions on WhatsApp is useful and conclusive or not	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	177	45.2
No	4	1.0
Other	7	1.8
No response	204	52.0
Total	392	100.0

Table 4 shows that 177(86.3%) respondents indicated that the discussions on the platform were useful and conclusive, while 4(2%) indicated that these discussions were not useful and conclusive. 7(3.4%) of the respondents abstained.

Qualitatively, all the 7 key informants indicated that the discussion on WhatsApp were conclusive and useful

Respondent W1 said.

.....Wawawa..it's wonderful, let me tell you we have a case, we tried two WhatsApp group and now it has gone to 40 ward, we started with Gotkachola and North Kadem. We are

only discussing development, we have ward administrators, Mps, locals. To an extent that members of the public communicated and the ward admin take report and this is what we report to the governor.

Participation of respondents in county budgeting process

This study revolved around the participation of members of the public in the county budgeting process. The respondents were therefore asked if they have participated in any county budgeting process. The findings were then presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Participation in the county budgeting process

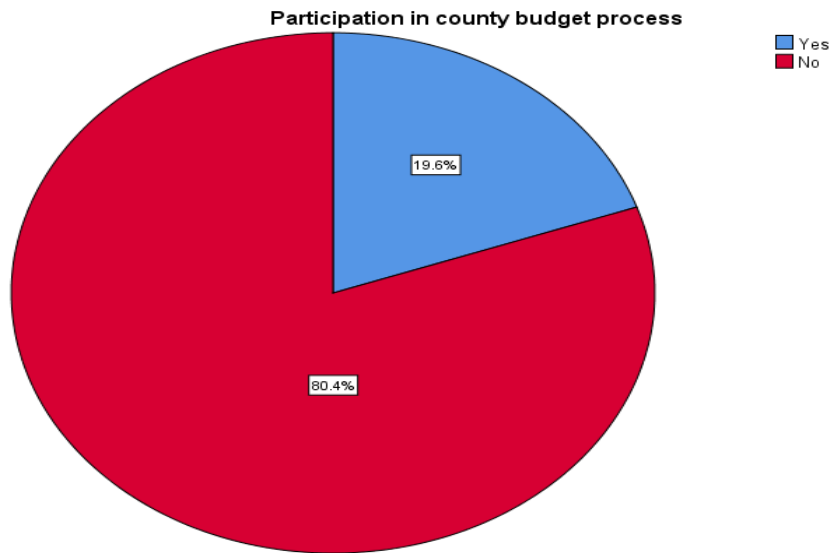


Figure 1 shows that 80.36 percent of the respondents indicated that they have not participated in any county budgeting process since the inception of devolution, while 19.64% percent indicated that they have participated in the county budgeting process. From the study, it was deduced that majority of the respondents (80.36%) have not participated in the county budgeting process. This would therefore mean that the county budgeting process has not been inclusive as required by Kenyan law. In Kenya, the county government Act 2012 has also recognized public participation as a key process.

Reasons for not participating in the county budgeting process

Having established that majority of the respondents had not participated in any county budget making process since the inception of the county government of Migori, the study inquired why they had not participated in the budgeting process. The respondents who had not participated in the county budgeting process were asked why they had not participated. The responses were presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Reasons for having not participated in public participation budgeting process

	Frequency	Percent
Expensive	4	1.0
Its political	3	.8
Lack of information	140	35.7
Lack of interest	10	2.6
Lack of involvement	83	21.2
Lack of time	35	8.9
Not convenient	40	10.2
Yes	77	19.6
Total	392	100.0

Table 5 above shows that 140(35.7%); 83(21.2%); 35(8.9%) and 40(10.2%) respondents cited lack of information, lack of involvement, lack of time and inconvenience respectively, as the main reasons why they have not participated in the county budgeting process. 4(1.0%) indicated that they have not participated in the process because it is expensive, while 3(0.8%) said they have not participated because of political issues. From the findings, lack of information about county budgeting process is the main reason why many people have not participated in the

exercise. This therefore means that an effective media channel is necessary. The use of effective media channel for public participation exercise has been emphasized in the Kenya public participation Act, 2018.

Access to information on the budgeting process

During the study, the respondents were asked about the medium they had been using to access information about county budget making process. The findings are presented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

Access of information on county budgeting process.

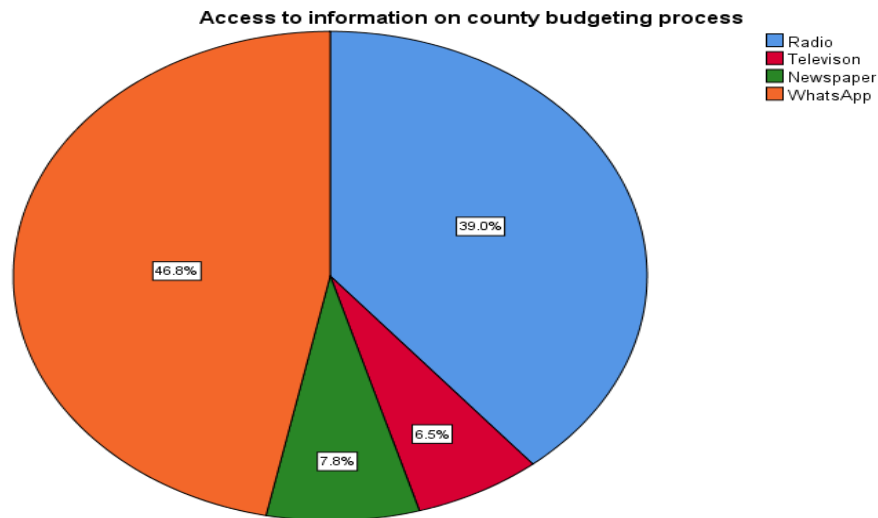


Figure 2 shows that 46.75%); 38.96%; 7.79% and 6.49% of the respondents got the information about public participation through WhatsApp group, radio, newspaper and Television respectively. From the findings, majority of the respondents got the information through WhatsApp. This therefore means that majority of the respondents in this study get information shared through WhatsApp. Hence, WhatsApp can be a good channel for sharing information about budgeting process. In the republic of Paraguay WhatsApp was used to increase participation in the 4th National

Action Plan (2018-2020). Sixteen online WhatsApp groups were created to increase public participation in the Action plan (OPSI 2018).

Use of WhatsApp in public participation budgeting process in Migori County.

The study sought to investigate if the county government of Migori is using WhatsApp for public participation in the budgeting process. The respondents were presented with questions and the responses are presented in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3

Discussion of development issues on WhatsApp.

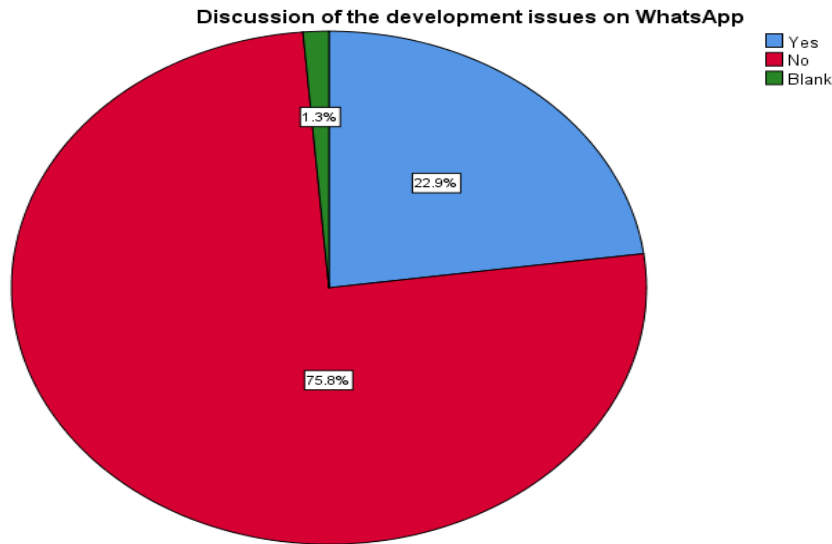


Figure 3 indicates that 75.82% of the respondents had never been on WhatsApp group discussing issues related to budget, while 22.88% of the respondents have participated. 1.31% of the respondents did not respond. The findings reveal that majority of the respondents have not participated in county budgeting process using WhatsApp platform. In the Republic of Paraguay WhatsApp was used to increase participation in the 4th National Action Plan (2018-2020).

Whether or not WhatsApp form a good platform for discussing county budget.

The respondents were asked whether or not WhatsApp can form a good platform for discussion budget .the finds are presented in figure 4.

Figure 4

Use of WhatsApp as a platform focusing Migori county budget

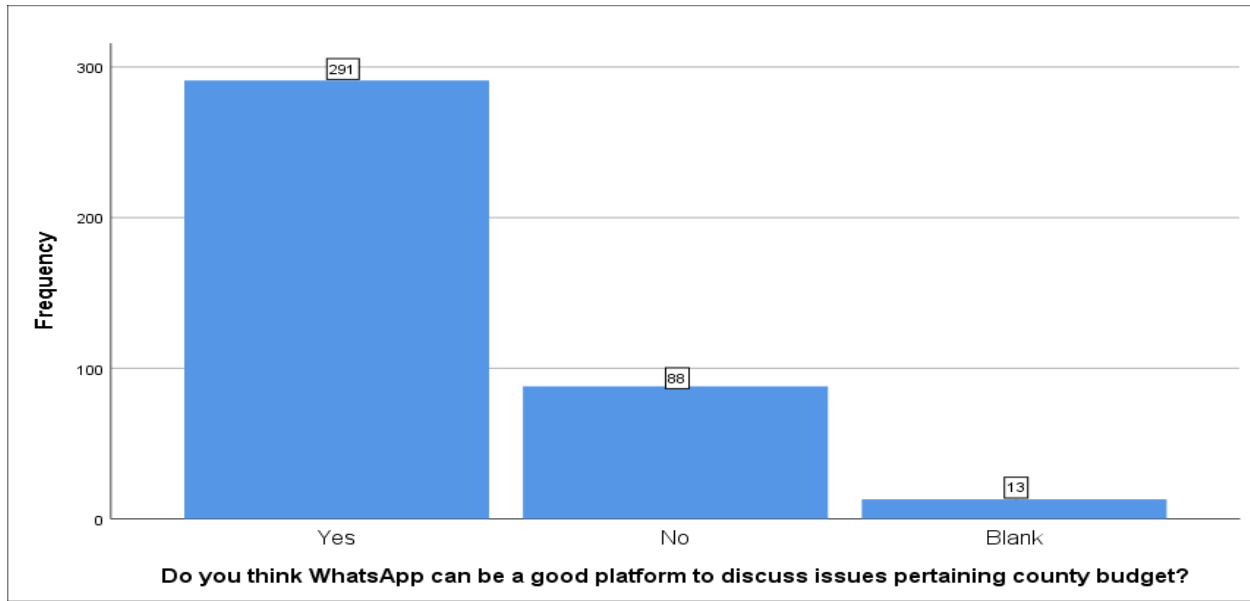


Figure 4 shows that 291(74.2%) indicated that WhatsApp can be a good platform for discussing budget, while 88(22.4%) of the respondents indicated that WhatsApp cannot be a good platform. 13 (3.6%) did not respond. Just like other studies, the findings reveal that WhatsApp is good for discussing county budget. Osimo (2008) argued that the social media application could improve the engagement between the public sector, organizations and the community.

Reasons for choosing WhatsApp messaging for public participation.

The respondents who indicated that WhatsApp messaging can be good for discussing issues around county budget were asked to give reasons for their choice. The responses are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Reasons for choosing WhatsApp messaging for public participation

Reasons for choosing WhatsApp	Frequency	Percentage
Bring together many people regardless of distance	51	13.0
Cheap	19	4.8
Conclusive discussion	62	15.8
Convenient	44	11.2
Ease of communication	21	5.4
Ease of use	21	5.4
Easily accessible	24	6.1
Effectiveness	3	.8
Efficient	8	2.0
End to End encryption/privacy	12	3.1
Flexible	3	.8
High level of interaction	5	1.3
No response	13	3.3
Not for WhatsApp platform	88	22.4
Real time messaging	18	4.6
Total	392	100.0

Table 6 shows that respondents preferred WhatsApp for public participation because of various reasons, which are: convenience (11.2), ease of communication (5.4%); conclusive discussion (15.8%), ease of use (5.4%) among others. These findings corroborates with those in other studies. Church & Oliveira (2013), in their multi-method study in Spain, found that WhatsApp was commonly adopted for convenience in communication and cost benefits.

Concerns when using WhatsApp as a platform for discussing Migori county budget

Concern over the use of WhatsApp as a platform for discussing Migori county budget was key in this study. The respondents were asked about their concerns. Their responses have been presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Concern when using WhatsApp for public participation budgeting process

	Frequency	Percentage
Accuracy of information/reliability	31	7.9
Attitude towards technology	3	.8
Awareness creating about the technology	102	26.0
Choice of language to use	3	.8
Confidentiality /privacy	21	5.4
Consistency in participation	1	.3
Controlling of discussion	15	3.8
Convenience	14	3.6
Cost of bundles	13	3.3
Cyber bullying	2	.5
Documentation/storage	1	.3
Effectiveness	9	2.3

Ethics	7	1.8
Information overload	20	5.1
Literacy level	7	1.8
Network challenges	4	1.0
No response	18	4.6
Ownership of smartphone	45	11.5
Participant selection criteria	50	12.8
Regulations /policy	17	4.3
Unity of the members	9	2.3
Total	392	100.0

As indicated in Table 7, the respondents highlighted various concerns regarding WhatsApp which include: abuse of the platform by participants, cost of bundles; coordination challenges; non-inclusivity, among others. Field and Chelliah (2013) noted that in order to manage risks associated with the use of social media, a policy covering the organizational use of the social media as well as the use by staff should be developed

Key Informants Interviews (“W”) cited lack of proper regulation, digital divide, and illiteracy others as major concerns that might undermine the use of WhatsApp messaging in public participation budgeting process in Migori County.

Respondent W4 said,

.....My chief fear and that would be to any person is that it does not have a formal way

of communication. Members would post nonsensical issues which might interrupt the process, members may talk without having the turn taking part of each member and may talk with emotion and as such may interfere.

The findings are in contrast to participatory development theory. Cited by Rodgers (1987) Schenck & Henk (1995) argue that any development project can be successful if its beneficiaries are put at the centre and they feel to be part of the programme. In that way, they feel that their capacities, talents, energies and other human resources are appreciated and hence they contribute more towards the project. To achieve a proper budget which is a key element in the development process in the county, having the citizens at the center in participating in the budgeting process is paramount.

The members of the public should also be able to access or participate in public participation budgeting process with ease. The finds in this study indicated that majority of the people would prefer the use of WhatsApp messaging for public participation because of ease of use. Church & Oliveira (2013), in their multi-method study in Spain, found that WhatsApp was commonly

4.0 Conclusions

The study concluded that the county of Migori has not embraced the use of WhatsApp in public participation during the budgeting process. It was deduced that public participation during the county budgeting process is not inclusive because of the limited number of people participating in the exercise.

5.0 Recommendations

In view of the finding, the research has recommended that the county government of

adopted for convenience in communication and cost benefits. This is in tandem with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) which was developed by David (1989). According to this model perceived ease and usefulness as the main determinant factors of a technology or information system use by an individual.

Migori adopt WhatsApp messaging as one of the communication tools for public participation in the budgeting process. Public participation policy which recognizes the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) should also be developed so that the communication tools like WhatsApp can be recognized. Use of WhatsApp should be incorporated in the county communication strategy. The gap in Migori county government communication policy should further be bridged.

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