

# AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN THE SADC REGION 2014 - 2020





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## 2014 - 2020

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## Key highlights

- i. Regional countries spend about 1.1 percent of GDP on digital investment, while advanced economies spend an average of 3.2 percent
- ii. 37% of social media users in the region have contributed to the creation of news, commented on it or shared it with others
- iii. There is an upward trend in arrests and detentions after political related publications on social media.
- iv. Notable regional trend in political parties and governments gaging members on social media.
- v. Social media interruptions through internet disruption are now common in the region.
- vi. Citizen journalism through social media is on the rise in the region.
- vii. There is significant growing employment of social media surveillance which threatens to squeeze the space for freedom of expression and access to information, including civic activism on social media.
- viii. Increasing presence of social media within political campaigns and electoral processes across the region.
- ix. Significant rise in organized social media manipulation through cyber troops within the region
- x. Substantial use of social media to 'break' news by traditional media houses.
- xi. Increase in social media surveillance in the region.
- xii. Internet penetration in 2019 averaged 39.6 percent in region compared to 62.7 percent in the rest of the world, affecting social media usage.
- xiii. Region has some of the highest total cost of mobile ownership in the world ranging from 10% to 68% of average income and also has highest cost of internet; limiting social media usage.
- xiv. Africa remains the only continent whose digital gender gap has widened since 2013

## Objectives

The overall objective of the research paper is to demystify and improve understanding of social media within the SADC<sup>1</sup> region context.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- Identify key trends pertaining to social media use in SADC region (covering all 16 countries<sup>2</sup>) and their implications to freedom of expression and access to information;
- Analysis of social media users and rate of penetration, access to social media and affordability;
- Map out social media use levels from the different platforms;
- Outline the legal and statutory environment and its impact on social media use in the SADC Region;
- Evaluate factors inhibiting social media use in the region from social, economic and political factors;
- Identify the risks and or threats associated with social media use and provide security measures to be implemented;
- Proffer solutions and or recommendations to identified challenges;
- Identify opportunities to enhance social media use in the region

## Methodology

To realize the aforementioned research objective(s), a ‘mixed methods’<sup>3</sup> research design was employed by collecting and analyzing quantitative<sup>4</sup> and qualitative<sup>5</sup> data for key social media trends, indicators, threats, opportunities and strengths within the SADC region. Data was sought through field and desktop research. Primary and secondary sources used included expert interviews<sup>6</sup>, legislative provisions, policies, and digital rights reports by human rights organisations, news articles among other relevant literature. The key analysis process was based on case studies and evidence from 8<sup>7</sup> SADC countries: Angola, DRC, Tanzania, Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe for the period 2014 to 2020.

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1 The 16 Member states: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe see : <https://www.sadc.int/member-states/>

2 *ibid*

3 [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-642-35879-1\\_5](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-642-35879-1_5)

4 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/nursing-and-health-professions/mixed-research-method>

5 *ibid*

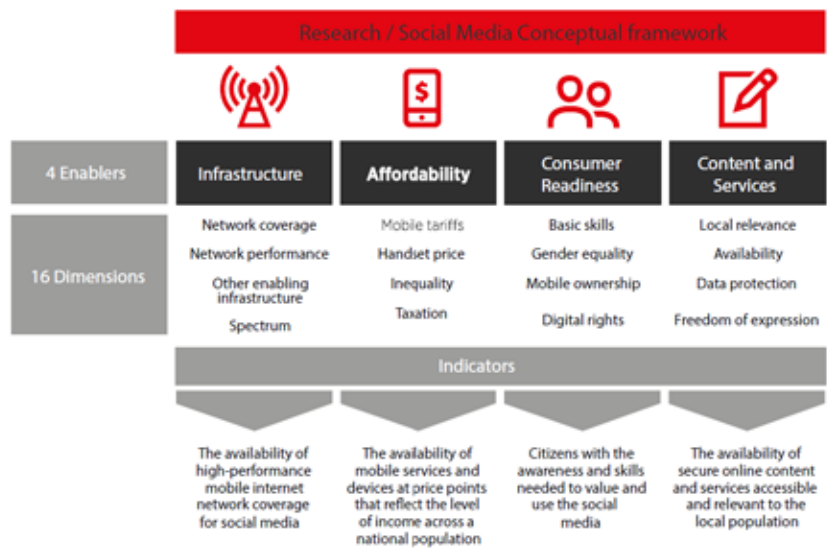
6 Interviews with regional experts: Key experts interviews were also conducted with a total of 8 purposively selected individuals based on their knowledge, role and interest in internet freedom issues in SADC region.

7 Selected through stratified and systematic sampling

## Conceptual framework

The research methodology is derived in large measure from digital rights standards mainly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>8</sup>. The analysis is based on the premise that these standards apply<sup>9</sup> to everyone and all countries, irrespective of geographical location and socio-economic status<sup>10</sup>. The research employed the following conceptual framework<sup>11</sup>:

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



Source: Own Diagram (2020) – Adopted and modified from Mobile connectivity index

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr\\_booklet\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://fra.europa.eu/en/news/2017/human-rights-are-universal-apply-everyone-every-day>

<sup>10</sup> Application of the UDHR can be premised on its ratification by the country concerned: As of the June 2020, all United Nations member States have ratified at least one of the nine core international human rights treaties, and 80 percent have ratified four or more, giving concrete expression to the universality of the UDHR and international human rights.: <https://www.un.org/en/sections/universal-declaration/human-rights-law/>

<sup>11</sup> Modified from and Informed by the mobile connectivity index: The Mobile Connectivity Index measures the performance of 165 countries against the key enablers of mobile internet adoption. <https://www.mobileconnectivityindex.com/>; <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/GSMA-State-of-Mobile-Internet-Connectivity-Report-2019.pdf>

## Background

Social media (SM)<sup>12</sup> are/is<sup>13</sup> more or less open, interactive and participatory platforms that allow users to communicate as well as to establish and maintain relationships<sup>14</sup>. SM have in recent years spread rapidly all over the world, and with approximately 7.7 billion people in the world, 3.5 billion are users of online platforms<sup>15</sup>; SM platforms are used by one-in-three<sup>16</sup> people in the world<sup>17</sup>, and more than two-thirds of all internet users.

The rapid and vast adoption of SM is changing how people find partners for their relational, professional, academic and business needs, access information from the news and organize to demand political change.

The use of social networks also provides opportunities and also threats in relation to digital rights of individuals as well as for the common good. In order to protect the fundamental rights of third parties and the public interest (e.g. security and public health), the government must meet certain legal requirements, to ensure

digital rights are protected and enjoyed by all.

The right to freedom of expression<sup>18</sup> as enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>19</sup> provides that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. This therefore includes the use of social media to express one's opinions or views. Free speech and expression is the lifeblood of democracy, facilitating open debate, the proper consideration of diverse interests and perspectives.<sup>20</sup>

The aforementioned rights work together with the right to privacy, recognized in article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and in many other international and regional human rights instruments<sup>21</sup>. Privacy<sup>22</sup> can be considered as the presumption that individuals should have an area of

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12 Social media (SM) and social networks (SN) will be used interchangeably.

13 The term "social media" is both singular and plural in modern English usage. The word "media" is traditionally a plural because "medium" is the singular. However, in reference to things like the news media, social media, etc., the usage often becomes singular because the nuance (shade of meaning) is taking the whole world of 'media' as a single unit, the paper uses both the singular and plural to refer to the term. Refer to <http://baxtercommunications.nl/is-it-social-media-is-or-social-media-are/#.Xq6hJ54za00>

14 <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/social-media/27397>

15 <https://ourworldindata.org/internet>

16 Social

17 <https://ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media>

18 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/freedom-of-expression/>

19 <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

20 <https://freedomhouse.org/issues/freedom-expression>

21 See, for example, article 16 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; article 14 of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; and article 22 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

22 See, for example, article 10 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; article 11 of the American Convention on Human Rights; and article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.



autonomous development, interaction and liberty, a “private sphere” with or without interaction with others, free from State intervention and from excessive unsolicited intervention by other uninvited individuals<sup>23</sup>. In the digital environment, informational privacy, covering information that exists or can be derived about a person and her or his life and the decisions based on that information is of particular importance.

The paper is structured in five interconnected parts: Firstly, it introduces key concepts, principles and literature within the regional context; secondly, it looks at key social media statistics and data from the region; thirdly, it focuses on specific country case studies. It then addresses issues of access, affordability and availability of social media and lastly, proffers recommendations and gives a conclusion.

### **Social media context**

Social media are generally defined as “Internet-based (though some platforms can be accessed without the

internet)<sup>24</sup> and persistent channels of mass personal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content”<sup>25</sup>. In other words, social media can be any form of computer-mediated communication where individuals not only set up profiles to present ‘who they are’ but also generate content of their own, see, and interact with content of their friends or other users online<sup>26</sup>.

Social networking sites, a subdomain of social media, have been defined as a networked communication platform in which participants: have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site<sup>27</sup>.

It is important to note that there is no authoritatively accepted definition<sup>28</sup>

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23 see, for example, A/HRC/13/37, Para. 11, and A/HRC/23/40, paras. 22 and 42

24 <https://newsable.asianetnews.com/technology/unlimited-access-to-facebook-without-internet>

25 Carr & Hayes, 2015, p. 49 in <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2056305117691544>

26 *ibid*

27 Ellison & Boyd, 2013, p. 157 in <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2056305117691544>

28 [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Who%20is%20connected%2C%20Social%20Media%20and%20the%20Digital%20Divide\\_0.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Who%20is%20connected%2C%20Social%20Media%20and%20the%20Digital%20Divide_0.pdf)

of what constitutes social media. As such, it is common to encounter difficulties in comparability in the existing analytical sources. As illustrated by the table below, this issue can be observed even in the case of highly reputable sources. Therefore, it is necessary to pay close attention to the basis for the statistics being discussed in order to synchronize these differences in definition shown in figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Social media coverage definitions

	Facebook	Snapchat	Youtube	LinkedIn	Twitter	Instagram	Pinterest	Whatsapp	FB Messenger	Google+	Skype	LINE	Viber	WeChat
How the World Changed Social Media*														
We are Social														
Jobvite**														
Social Media Examiner***														
GlobalWebIndex****														
Hootsuite														

Notes: Country scope for each analysis is as follows:

* Considers 8 countries (Brazil, Chile, China, England, India, Italy, Trinidad and Turkey)
** survey from 1,400 recruiting and human resources professionals
***6 countries (United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, India and South Africa)
****45 countries

Source: UNESCAP<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Who%20is%20connected%2C%20Social%20Media%20and%20the%20Digital%20Divide\\_0.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Who%20is%20connected%2C%20Social%20Media%20and%20the%20Digital%20Divide_0.pdf)

### Measuring social media usage

Individual SM platform track their usage statistics in non-standard ways, and analyze and release these data pursuant to their corporate policies; it is difficult to make conclusions related to the crosscutting use of SM platforms in the aggregate at the neither national nor regional level. These data tracking factors can particularly be seen in platforms with different business models.

SM platforms tend to promote estimates of the number of people who could potentially view shared content<sup>30</sup>. This metric, commonly known as ‘reach’ is computed using diverse methods and some are closely guarded, proprietary processes<sup>31</sup>. Measures of this type are vital to the advertising-driven business models of Facebook, but comparatively much less relevant to applications such as WhatsApp. Because this key data is available almost exclusively, processes which do not provide transparent methodology and are only relevant to some but not all applications, it illustrates the analytical difficulty faced by researchers and policy makers.

For SM platforms that seek to broadcast content, such as Twitter find great value in measures such as ‘amplification’<sup>32</sup>.

This term refers to the onward sharing of social media content to other social groups than the original recipient. For applications such as Snapchat, which focuses more on the direct sharing of images with specified friends only, amplification is not a suitable measure of usage rates.

In some cases, visiting a platform once a month constitutes the measure of ‘monthly active user’<sup>33</sup>, and is a generally accepted baseline. However, the measure ‘daily active user’ is viewed with significantly more value as an indication of the health and profitability of an application<sup>34</sup>. In general, more frequent access, and more sharing of original content, tends to indicate whether or not a social media network is growing or shrinking, healthy or fading<sup>35</sup>. Therefore, speaking of ‘social media’ use rates in a specific country over time is quite problematic<sup>36</sup>.

It must be noted that, not only do social networks change significantly over time; their records are subject to significant retroactive revision. According to analysis undertaken in 2018<sup>37</sup>, variances can be observed in the reported inauthentic accounts reported by quarterly reports and the numbers of accounts actually removed. Taken together, these

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30 <https://www.facebook.com/business/help/1665333080167380?id=176276233019487>

31 <https://www.iab.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/AudienceReachMeasurementGuidelines.pdf>

32 <https://www.gshiftlabs.com/social-media-blog/social-amplification-part-1-of-3-what-is-social-amplification/>

33 <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/monthly-active-user-mau.asp>

34 <https://www.vox.com/2019/2/7/18215204/twitter-daily-active-users-dau-snapchat-q4-earnings>

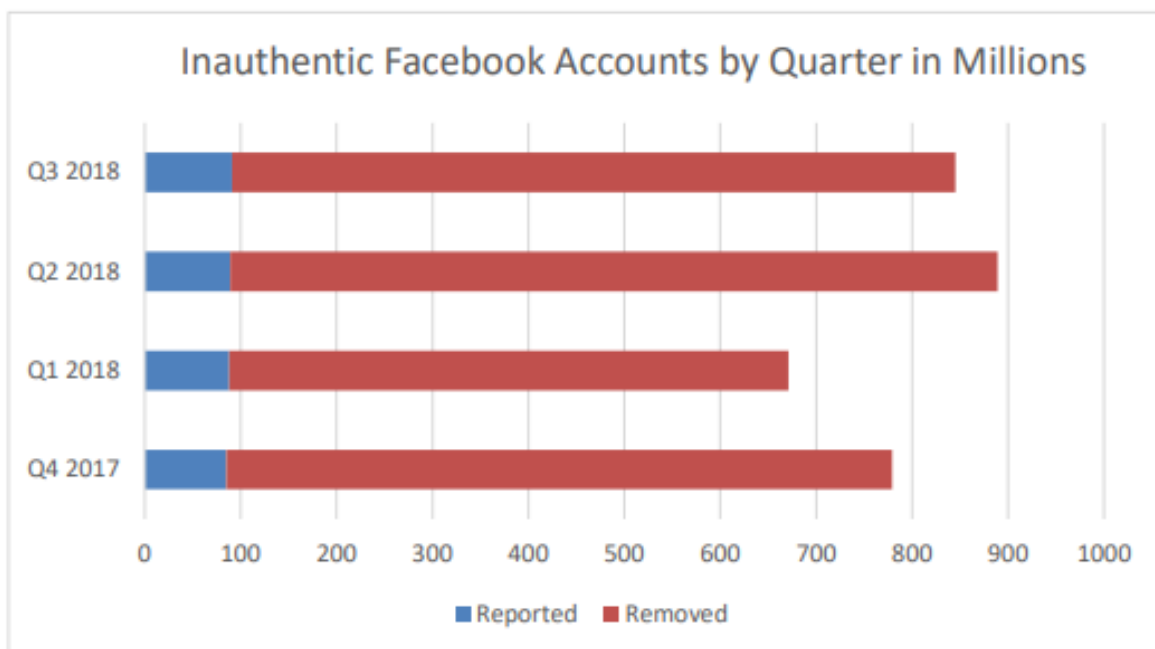
35 <https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/twitter-reports-another-decline-in-users-shifts-to-alternate-performance-m/547981/>

36 <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/06/how-facebook-is-trying-to-fix-itself.html>

37 Source: New York Times (2019), Does Facebook Really Know How Many Fake Accounts it Has?

data points illustrate the opacity of the user data in question and therefore represent a significant challenge for detailed data analysis. Research<sup>38</sup> suggests that the levels of inauthentic accounts can be estimated at approximately 4.56 per cent of total users<sup>39</sup> as shown figure 3.

Figure 3: Inauthentic Facebook accounts



Source: ResearchGate<sup>40</sup>

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38 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299548775\\_Discover\\_millions\\_of\\_fake\\_followers\\_in\\_Weibo](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299548775_Discover_millions_of_fake_followers_in_Weibo)

39 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299548775\\_Discover\\_millions\\_of\\_fake\\_followers\\_in\\_Weibo](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299548775_Discover_millions_of_fake_followers_in_Weibo)

40 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299548775\\_Discover\\_millions\\_of\\_fake\\_followers\\_in\\_Weibo](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299548775_Discover_millions_of_fake_followers_in_Weibo)

# Social media use and Exercise of rights

The importance of the right to freedom of expression cannot be understated. It is not only important as a self-standing right, but also as a crucial enabling right that serves<sup>41</sup> to realize openness, accountability and transparency. When the UN Human Rights Committee<sup>42</sup> last clarified the rights to freedom of opinion and expression three decades ago, the use of the internet was limited and the effect it would have on the mainstream media was still the subject of speculation<sup>43</sup>. The Committee in 2011<sup>44</sup> went on to give practical application to freedom of opinion and expression in an environment of internet and mobile communications. Describing it as<sup>45</sup> “a global network to exchange ideas and opinions that does not necessarily rely on the traditional mass media”, the Committee said<sup>46</sup> “States parties should take all necessary steps to foster the independence of these new media and to ensure access”.

Key international and regional standards that protect freedom of expression:

- Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR)<sup>47</sup>
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)<sup>48</sup>
- General Comment No. 34 on Article 19 of the ICCPR (General Comment No. 34)<sup>49</sup>
- African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (African Charter)<sup>50</sup>
- Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa (African Declaration on Freedom of Expression)<sup>51</sup>
- African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG)<sup>52</sup>

Freedom of expression and opinion<sup>53</sup> are indispensable conditions for the full development of the

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41 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366340>

42 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/FreedomExpressionandnewmedia.aspx>

43 *ibid*

44 *ibid*

45 *ibid*

46 *ibid*

47 <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

48 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

49 <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/gc34.pdf>

50 <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201520/volume-1520-I-26363-English.pdf>

51 <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/achpr/expressionfreedomdec.html>

52 [http://archive.ipu.org/idd-E/afr\\_charter.pdf](http://archive.ipu.org/idd-E/afr_charter.pdf)

53 <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/GC34.pdf>

person. They are essential for any society.<sup>54</sup> According to a joint statement<sup>55</sup> Freedom of expression applies to the internet, as it does to all means of communication. Restrictions<sup>56</sup> on freedom of expression on the Internet are only acceptable if they comply with established international standards, including that they are provided for by law, proportionate and necessary to protect an interest which is recognized under international law (the ‘three-part’ test<sup>57</sup>). They constitute the foundation stone for every free and democratic society<sup>58</sup>. The two freedoms are closely related, with freedom of expression providing the vehicle for the exchange and development of opinions.

Freedom of expression is a necessary condition for the realization of the principles of transparency and accountability that are, in turn, essential for the promotion and protection of human rights<sup>59</sup>. Among the other articles that contain guarantees for freedom of opinion and/or expression, are articles 18, 17, 25 and 27. The freedoms of opinion and expression form a basis for the full enjoyment of a wide range of other human rights.

### **Sadc regional laws on social media<sup>60</sup>**

There are no specific laws that address social media directly, but social media is not in a legal vacuum and is regulated or affected by a addressed in broad spectra of internet, criminal, media laws among other set of laws within the region. A specific set is the SADC model law, more accurately referred to as the HIPSSA (Harmonization of ICT Policies in Sub-Saharan Africa). The model law<sup>61</sup> that the regional countries relied/rely on was released in 2011 and adopted by the SADC Council of Ministers responsible for ICT in 2012. The law addresses issues around cybersecurity, cybercrime and data protection which are key aspects related to social media use. In Lesotho, Swaziland and Tanzania the model has been used verbatim, while Mauritius and South Africa have appropriately changed the model framework to suit their domestic legislative set-up and needs.

The same set of laws have also been proposed in Zimbabwe as separate laws, then as the Cybersecurity and Cybercrimes Bill<sup>62</sup> which incorporated the draft Data Protection Bill and the Electronic Transactions and Electronic Commerce

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54 See communication No. 1173/2003, Benhadj v. Algeria, Views adopted on 20 July 2007; No. 628/1995, Park v. Republic of Korea, Views adopted on 5 July 1996.

55 The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Organization of American States (OAS) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information.

56 <https://www.osce.org/fom/78309?download=true>

57 <https://everyoneshallhavetheright.wordpress.com/3-part-test/>

58 See the Committee’s general comment No. 24 (1994) on issues relating to reservations made upon ratification or accession to the Covenant or the Optional Protocols thereto, or in relation to the declarations under article 41 of the Covenant, Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 40, vol. I (A/50/40 (Vol. I), annex V.

59 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/07/382902>

60 Thursday, 5 July, 2018 1 ministerial statement on the electronic and social media platforms by the Hon. Minister of transport and communication, Mr. Mushimba. [http://www.parliament.gov.zm/sites/default/files/images/publication\\_docs/MINISTERIAL%20STATEMENT%20BY%20THE%20HON.%20MINISTER%20OF%20TRANS.%20AND%20COM.%20MR%20MUSHIMBA,%20ON%20SOCIAL%20MEDIA\\_0.pdf](http://www.parliament.gov.zm/sites/default/files/images/publication_docs/MINISTERIAL%20STATEMENT%20BY%20THE%20HON.%20MINISTER%20OF%20TRANS.%20AND%20COM.%20MR%20MUSHIMBA,%20ON%20SOCIAL%20MEDIA_0.pdf)

61 <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2016/08/zims-cyber-laws-going-nowhere-quickly/>

62 Appearing before the Parliamentary Committee on Media, Information Communication Technology and Cyber Security on 8 February 2018, the minister justified the consolidation saying all three Bills work to prevent various forms of cybercrime. The decision might also have been inspired by the introduction of an omnibus Cybercrimes Bill in South Africa. <https://ifex.org/proposed-omnibus-cyber-bill-threatens-to-muddy-fundamental-rights-in-zimbabwe/>

Bill. In May 2020, the Government then gazetted<sup>63</sup> the Cybersecurity and Data Protection Bill.

## 8.0. SADC region Internet Usage, 2020 Population Stats and Facebook Subscribers<sup>64</sup>

Figure 5: AFRICA 2020 POPULATION AND INTERNET USERS<sup>65</sup> STATISTICS<sup>66</sup>

Country	Population <sup>67</sup> (2020 Est.)	Internet Users 31-Dec-2000 <sup>68</sup>	Internet Users <sup>69</sup> 31-DEC-2019	Penetration (% Population)		
Angola	32,866,272	30,000	7,078,067	21.5 %	23,493 %	
Botswana	2,351,627	15,000	1,116,079	47.5 %	6,455 %	
Comoros	869,901	1,500	178,500	20.5%	11,800 %	
Congo, Dem. Rep.	89,561,403	500	7,475,917	8.3 %		
Eswatini	1,160,164	10,000	665,245	57.3 %	6,552 %	
Lesotho	2,142,249	4,000	682,990	31.9 %	16,975 %	
Madagascar	27,691,018	30,000	2,643,025	9.5 %	8,710 %	
Malawi	19,129,952	15,000	2,717,243	14.2 %	18,015 %	
Mauritius	1,271,768	87,000	852,000	67.0 %	879 %	
Mozambique	31,255,435	30,000	6,523,613	20.9 %	21,645 %	
Namibia	2,540,905	30,000	1,347,418	53.0 %	4,391 %	

<sup>63</sup> [http://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas\\_d/files/Cyber%20Security%20and%20Data%20Protection%20Bill.pdf](http://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Cyber%20Security%20and%20Data%20Protection%20Bill.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> [www.internetworldstats.com](http://www.internetworldstats.com)

<sup>65</sup> Africa Internet usage information comes from, among others, data published by WWW, ITU , Facebook, and other trustworthy information sources.

<sup>66</sup> For definitions, navigation help and methodology, see the site surfing guide.

<sup>67</sup> Africa Population numbers are mid-year 2020 estimates, based on data from the United Nations Population Division.

<sup>68</sup> For Internet growth comparison purposes, baseline Internet usage data for the year 2000 is also displayed.

<sup>69</sup> Africa Internet Statistics for Dec 31, 2019, updated as of March 21, 2020

Seychelles	98,347	6,000	71,300	72.5 %	1,088 %	71,000
South Africa	59,308,690	2,400,000	32,615,165	55.0 %	1,259 %	
Tanzania	59,734,218	115,000	23,142,960	38.7 %	20,024 %	
Zambia	18,383,955	20,000	9,870,427	53.7 %	49,252 %	
Zimbabwe	14,862,924	50,000	8,400,000	56.5 %	16,700 %	
TOTAL AFRICA	1,340,598,447	4,514,400	526,710,313	39.3 %	11,567 %	
Rest of World	6,456,017,263	82.8 %	4,058,868,405	62.9 %	88.5 %	
WORLD TOTAL	7,796,615,710	100.0 %	4,585,578,718	58.8 %	100.0 %	

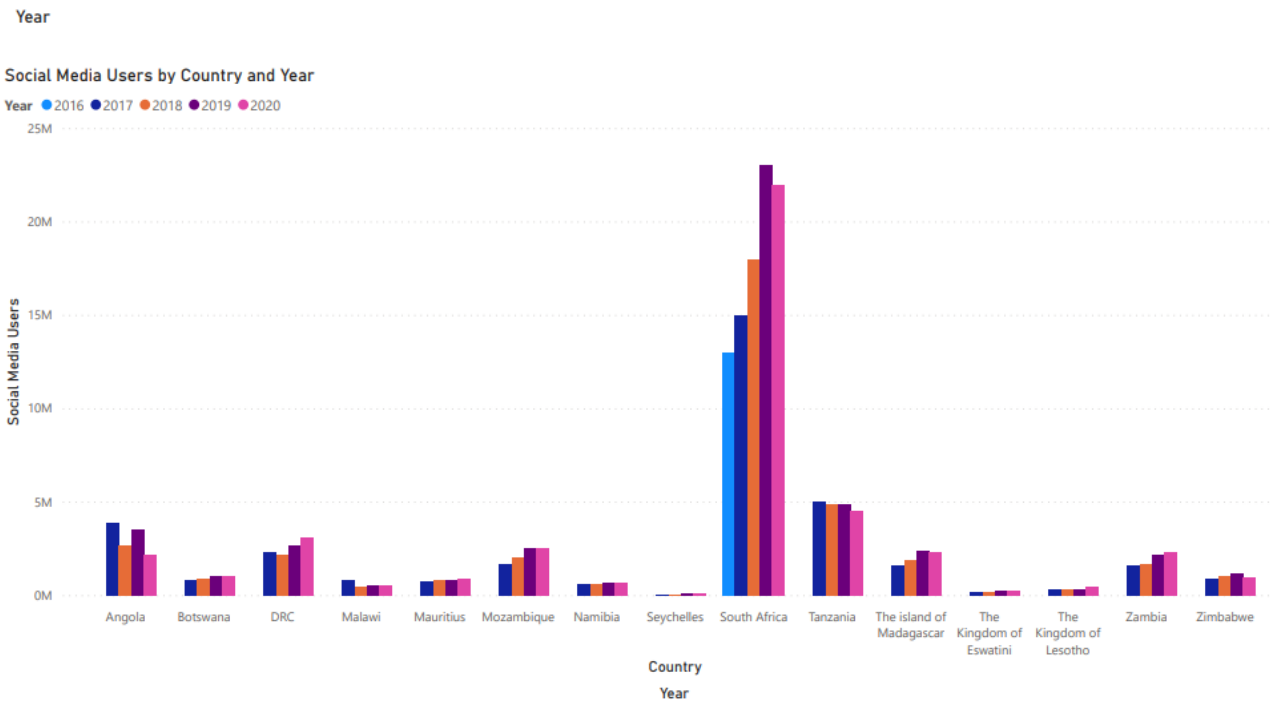
Source: Internet World Stats<sup>71</sup>

Social media usage<sup>72</sup> trends in the region are shown in figure 6 below:

<sup>71</sup> www.internetworldstats.com

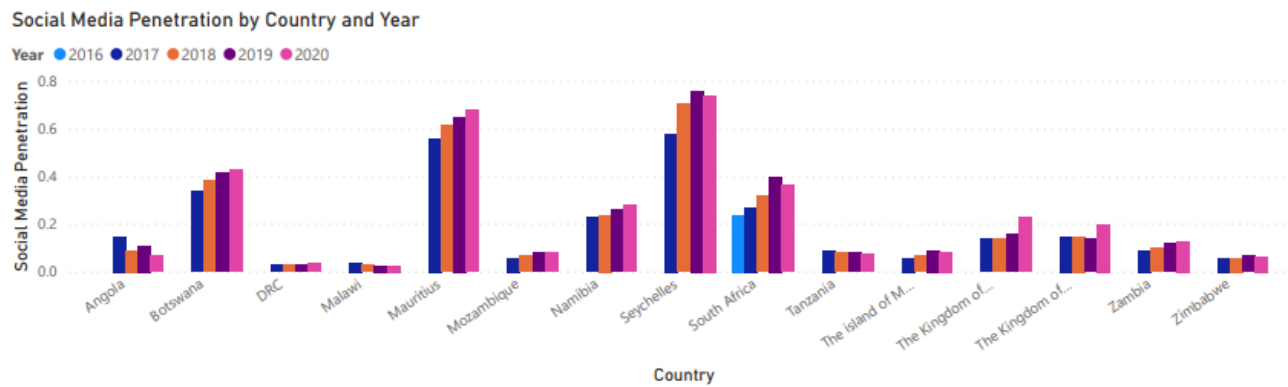
<sup>72</sup> https://datareportal.com/reports





Source: Own Chart from data from Data Reportal<sup>73</sup>

<sup>73</sup> <https://datareportal.com/reports>

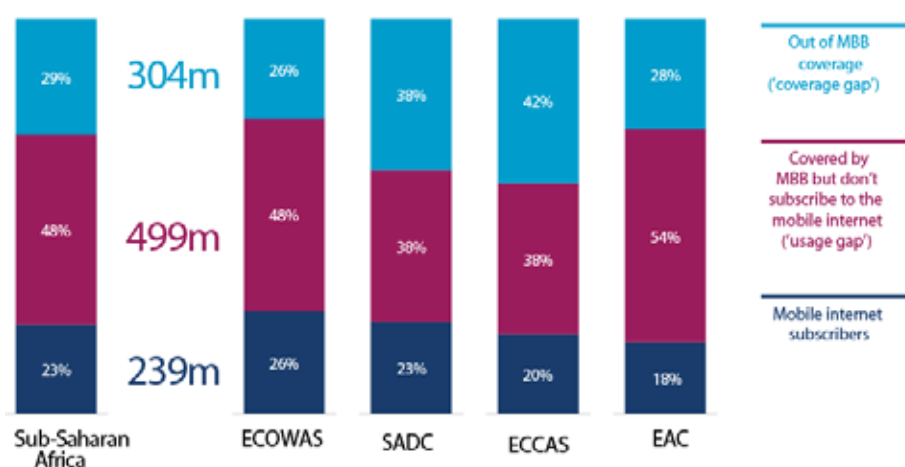


Source: Own chart based on data from data report

# Mobile broadband & social media usage in SADC region<sup>74</sup>

Social media usage is driving mobile Internet Usage<sup>75</sup> in the region. The high demand for social media is directly contributing to internet usage for example in Zimbabwe WhatsApp contributes over 44% of all mobile internet usage in the country.<sup>76</sup> Mobile broad band coverage affects the penetration of social media in the region. Below is a comparison of mobile broad band in the region compared with other regions:

Figure 8: Mobile broadband statistics



Source: GSMA<sup>77</sup>

74 RIA After Access survey data, 2017 in [https://researchictafrica.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019\\_After-Access\\_Africa-Comparative-report.pdf](https://researchictafrica.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019_After-Access_Africa-Comparative-report.pdf)

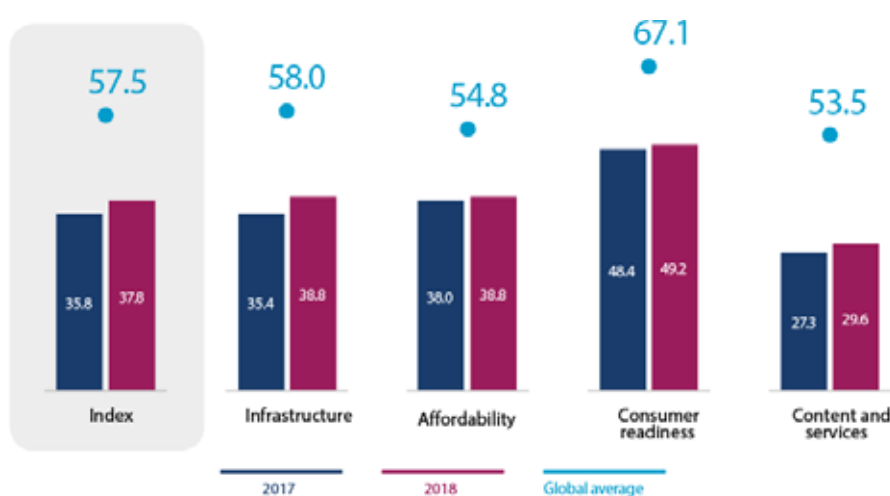
75 [https://researchictafrica.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019\\_After-Access\\_Africa-Comparative-report.pdf](https://researchictafrica.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019_After-Access_Africa-Comparative-report.pdf)

76 <https://qz.com/africa/1114551/in-zimbabwe-whatsapp-takes-nearly-half-of-all-internet-traffic/>

77 <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/topic/connected-society-topic/mobile-connectivity-index-2018-analysing-the-state-of-mobile-internet-connectivity-across-the-world/>

The aggregate score in mobile connectivity index<sup>78</sup> in the region seems to be improving. In the 2019 Index, the region saw a modest 2 percentage-point improvement in average score in 2018 over the previous year, to reach 37.8 but still some way off global average across all enablers, as shown in figure 9 below:

Figure 9: Mobile connectivity index of the SADC Region



Source: GSMA<sup>79</sup>

The infrastructure and availability of content/services enablers recorded the highest increase as a result of significant investments in 3G and 4G network expansions and the increasing availability of locally relevant online content.<sup>80</sup>

### Internet usage – social media time distribution

According to Research ICT Africa,<sup>81</sup> the share of Internet users who spend most of their time on social media is found to be higher in relatively low-income countries than in

78 The GSMA Mobile Connectivity Index is a global mobile connectivity and digital economy guide covering 150 countries and 7 sub-regions : <http://www.mobileconnectivityindex.com/>

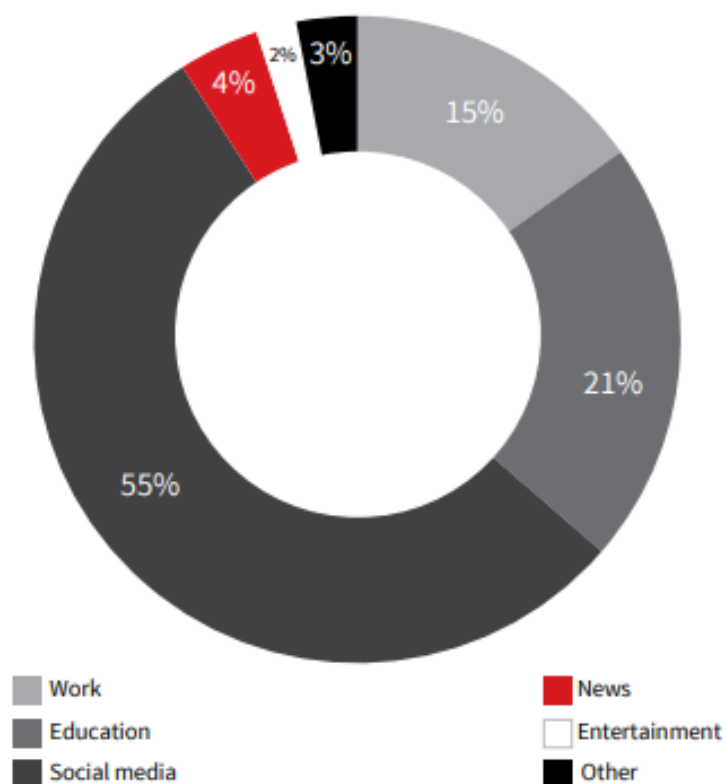
79 <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/topic/connected-society-topic/mobile-connectivity-index-2018-analysing-the-state-of-mobile-internet-connectivity-across-the-world/>

80 <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/topic/connected-society-topic/mobile-connectivity-index-2018-analysing-the-state-of-mobile-internet-connectivity-across-the-world/>

81 [https://researchictafrica.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019\\_After-Access\\_Africa-Comparative-report.pdf](https://researchictafrica.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019_After-Access_Africa-Comparative-report.pdf)

those countries where GNI per capita<sup>82</sup> is higher, with Senegal being an exception. In particular, 44% of Internet users in South Africa spend most of their time on social media, 68% Tanzania and six in ten (62%) in Lesotho spend most of their time on the Internet mainly for communication purposes. Only 21% of the users access educational content on the Internet, while 15% use the Internet for work as shown in figure 10 below:

Figure 10: Mobile Internet usage



Source: Research Africa<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD>

<sup>83</sup> [https://researchictafrica.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019\\_After-Access\\_Africa-Comparative-report.pdf](https://researchictafrica.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019_After-Access_Africa-Comparative-report.pdf)

## Internet usage - Social media – Age distribution

Furthermore the research<sup>84</sup> findings suggest that six out of ten individuals aged 15–34 years who use the Internet spend most of their time on social media (as shown figure 11 below). Three in ten (30% of Internet users aged 15–24 years) spend most of their time on the Internet searching for educational content while internet users aged 45–54 years spend most of their time on the Internet accessing work-related content.

Figure 11: Internet usage - Social media – Age distribution

	15-24 YEARS	25-34 YEARS	35-44 YEARS	45-54 YEARS	55+
Work	3%	18%	25%	40%	23%
Educational	30%	15%	14%	14%	23%
Social media	60%	57%	48%	32%	37%
News	4%	4%	4%	6%	6%
Entertainment	2%	3%	2%	3%	1%
Other	1%	3%	7%	5%	10%

Source: After Access<sup>85</sup>

## The two social media rifts trends

### Social media stakeholders roles

First, the boundary between author, producer, distributor and user of SM in SADC region is significantly blurring which has resulted in a growing stakeholder rift. While in traditional media a clear separation between service providers (e.g. professional editors, film directors, media companies) and users (the public) tends to prevail, social media users can easily switch between producer and consumer roles. Any user(s) can individually or jointly create content or modify the existing content of third parties and decide on distribution to other users.

84 RIA After Access survey data, 2017 in [https://researchictafrica.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019\\_After-Access\\_Africa-Comparative-report.pdf](https://researchictafrica.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019_After-Access_Africa-Comparative-report.pdf)

85 RIA After Access survey data, 2017 in [https://researchictafrica.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019\\_After-Access\\_Africa-Comparative-report.pdf](https://researchictafrica.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019_After-Access_Africa-Comparative-report.pdf)

For example open journalism<sup>86</sup> is creating new sources for professional journalists; activists using technology are providing remarkable on-the-ground raw material for news stories. Research<sup>87</sup> has shown that 37% of social media users have contributed to the creation of news, commented on it or shared it with others.

Citizen journalism on social media<sup>88</sup> is also on the rise within the region and it involves private individuals, who are normally the consumers of journalism, generating their own news content. Citizens collect, report, analyze, and disseminate news and information, just as professional journalists would, creating what is known as user-generated content.

### **Private-public social media scope**

Secondly, there is a growing rift due to the blurring of the boundary between private and public communication in the region. Traditionally there were separate channels for private and public communication: In private communication the sender usually knows the receiver(s) (e.g. in person, by letter or in telephone conversations). In public communication the sender does not usually have precise knowledge of the receivers. Social media sites allow users to easily switch between private and public communication on the same platform. This is reinforced by the fact that traditional mass media is also present on social networks and can help users

achieve a mass media effect when they act on and share these.

All the major newspapers, radio and television and other mass media outlets in the region are present and very active on social media, for example in South Africa News24 (@News24) was in top 10 twitter<sup>89</sup> handles with 3 472 387 followers, while in Zimbabwe top five has 2 newspapers in the top 5 twitter accounts; NewsDay Zimbabwe (@NewsDayZimbabwe) 512 287 followers while 263Chat263Chat (@263Chat) 438 391 followers.<sup>90</sup>

### **Risk(s) to users: Arrest and/or detentions after publications on Social Media**

There is an upward trend of arrest and detentions after publication exposing, insulting or challenging politically exposed persons<sup>91</sup> on social media. The United Nations Human Rights Committee<sup>92</sup> issued<sup>93</sup> a commentary on freedom of expression that anti-blasphemy laws and restrictions on criticism of governments are incompatible with existing norms and that free expression is essential for the protection of human rights. As an example some cases from the region are as follows:

#### **Arrest(s) after publication: Case of Angola**

On May 10, 2019 in Luanda, Hsamussuku Tshikonde was detained ‘unlawfully<sup>94</sup>’ for 72 hours for allegedly “insulting the president” in

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86 <https://www.theguardian.com/media-network/media-network-blog/2014/jul/09/open-journalism-africa-internet-smartphone>

87 <https://theconversation.com/the-future-of-news-crowdsourced-and-connected-4276>

88 <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-citizen-journalism-2073663>

89 <https://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/twitter/profiles/south-africa>

90 <https://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/twitter/profiles/zimbabwe>

91 <https://complyadvantage.com/knowledgebase/politically-exposed-persons/>

92 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/07/382902>

93 *ibid*

94 without charge or access to a lawyer

a video<sup>95</sup> that he had posted on social media. This follows the detention of the activist, who was part of a group of 17, arrested in 2015<sup>96</sup> for alleged attack of the president, on social media again and were charged in March 2016 on allegations of planning a rebellion against the government of the then-president Jose Eduardo Dos Santos. They were convicted<sup>97</sup> and sentenced to between two and eight years in prison, but were released<sup>98</sup> in June 2016 after the Supreme Court overturned their convictions.

#### **Arrest(s) after publication: Case of Zambia**

A teacher was jailed and sentenced to two years imprisonment for allegedly defaming the President using his social media account<sup>99</sup>. In April 2019, Zambian Police in conjunction with ZICTA and with the help of Chinese experts at Huawei<sup>100</sup> managed to track administrators of a Facebook page Koswe<sup>101</sup>; four people were arrested for alleged publication of malicious articles and falsehood against the PF administration with insults directed at President Edgar Lungu.<sup>102</sup>

#### **Arrest(s) after publication: Case of Zimbabwe**

In Zimbabwe a member of parliament was arrested on allegations that sometime in December 2018, he posted Twitter messages<sup>103</sup>

that had the effect of inciting people to revolt against the government in his personal capacity as an opposition MP. Also, a Zimbabwean Activist and Pastor has been arrested several times for allegedly inciting violence through Twitter and other forms of social media.<sup>104</sup>

#### **Censorship and Intimidation against free speech on Social media**

There is notable trend in political parties and governments gagging members on what to say on social media, censorship by these organisations of their members on social media platforms reduces dialogue, shrinks public knowledge for everyone and prevents citizens from holding those in power to account. Some example of these gagging incidences in the region are:

#### **Censorship and intimidation against free speech on social media - Case of Zambia**

In February 2019, Zambia Police Command directed administrators of all existing social media groupings to delete them, warning of severe action if the directive was not adhered to.<sup>105</sup>

Home affairs Minister Mr. Kampyongo said

“...government is working with Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA) and

95 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXCd5IHPXZU&feature=youtu.be>

96 <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/colocado-em-liberdade-ativista-angolano-do-grupo-dos-17-acusado-de-ultraje-ao-presidente/4915182.html>

97 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/03/31/dispatches-basic-rights-still-pipe-dream-angola>

98 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/29/dispatches-angolan-activists-conditionally-free>

99 163 “Luapula Teacher sent to Jail for two years for defaming President Lungu on Social Media”, Lusaka Times, 4 March 2019, <https://bit.ly/2X71bAC>

100 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/huawei-technicians-helped-african-governments-spy-on-political-opponents-11565793017>

101 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/huawei-technicians-helped-african-governments-spy-on-political-opponents-11565793017>

102 <https://www.zambianobserver.com/admins-of-koswe-page-apprehended-by-police/>

103 <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2019/03/mdc-mp-hwende-remanded-in-custody/>

104 <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/01/16/africa/zimbabwe-crackdown-protests/index.html>

105 <https://mwebantu.news/delete-all-police-social-media-groups-orders-ig/>



other stakeholders to deal with those police officers found wanting of contributing to ill social media platforms.”<sup>106</sup>

Furthermore, Zambia Police commission also said that

“Police and Immigration officers spreading falsehoods on social media will be disciplined.”<sup>107</sup>

Adding to that, all WhatsApp group administrators in Zambia<sup>108</sup> are now required to register the groups and set up codes of ethics or risk being arrested if there is a breach. The new rule was announced<sup>109</sup> in June 2018 by Zambia Information and Communications Technology (ZICTA) Director, in a move widely perceived by many as efforts by the Zambian government to control free speech.<sup>110</sup>

In 2019, ruling party, Patriotic front (PF), through its Secretary General<sup>111</sup> said<sup>112</sup> the party had made progress in constituting a social media monitoring team for its members. In a statement<sup>113</sup>, they directed all members of the Party in the habit of taking insults to social media to immediately stop or face repercussions.

### Gagging free speech on social media - Case of Angola

UN human rights Committee<sup>114</sup> has shown

concern<sup>115</sup> “at reports that the Angolan media is largely controlled by the Government and the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola. It is also concerned at reports that the social communication legislative package was approved with minimal debate, despite opposition from the journalists’ union and others, and that it actually limits freedom of expression by, inter alia, giving the Ministry of Social Communication the authority to oversee how media organizations arrive at editorial decisions, and to fine or suspend the activities of violators of the law (arts. 9, 7 and 19).

The Committee<sup>116</sup> is particularly concerned about article 82 of the Press Law, which criminalizes publication of a text or image that is offensive to individuals, and the existence of defamation provisions in the new Penal Code, which may be used to silence dissent and penalize statements made by members of the media.”

For example prominent journalist Rafael Marques de Morais who runs the critical news blog Maka Angola was charged with “crimen injuria” (insult) for an October 2016 article published on the news site that accused Angola’s attorney general of illegal business practices in his purchase of state-owned land.<sup>117</sup>

106 <https://www.zambianobserver.com/police-officers-are-using-social-media-to-incite-citizens-to-rise-against-the-government-says-kampy-ongo/>

107 Zambia Police Service Commission chairperson Peter Chingaipe <http://www.daily-mail.co.zm/social-media-cops-warned/>

108 <https://www.techzim.co.zw/2018/06/whatsapp-admins-in-zambia-will-soon-need-to-be-registered-with-the-government/>

109 <https://www.zambianobserver.com/video-zambia-to-start-registering-arresting-whatsapp-administrators/>

110 <https://nairobineews.nation.co.ke/news/whatsapp-admins-zambia-register-groups>

111 Davies Mwile: <https://diggers.news/local/2019/06/07/pf-social-media-crack-squad-making-progress-mwila/>

112 <https://diggers.news/local/2019/06/07/pf-social-media-crack-squad-making-progress-mwila/>

113 <https://diggers.news/local/2019/06/07/pf-social-media-crack-squad-making-progress-mwila/>

114 <http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPRiCAqhKb7yhssYKsbEpZrhJQHFJCpU9uxz45m-4deD8qezOGyU3O5WmC18SkteKF77AvT1RBZlOmxdI6zwKVUHSELM0s45jaPIll%2BGhH6F8EJNfJhZ%2B4UKRj>

115 *ibid*

116 <http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPRiCAqhKb7yhssYKsbEpZrhJQHFJCpU9uxz45m-4deD8qezOGyU3O5WmC18SkteKF77AvT1RBZlOmxdI6zwKVUHSELM0s45jaPIll%2BGhH6F8EJNfJhZ%2B4UKRj>

117 [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FOTN%202017\\_Angola.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FOTN%202017_Angola.pdf)

## Gagging free speech on social media - Case of Botswana

The Botswana constitution<sup>118</sup> and law provide for freedom of speech and press; however, the law<sup>119</sup> (Penal Code (Cap. 08:01) (1973 Rev.), s. 93) restricts the speech against some government officials and fines persons found guilty of insulting public officials or national symbols (courts have given judgment based on the law<sup>120</sup>), for example in *Mokgothu v. The State* 1986 BLR 34 (HC)<sup>121</sup>, O'Brien Quinn C.J. the accused was convicted based on that piece of legislation.

## Social media interruption through Internet disruptions

Internet disruptions are now common in the region. These disruptions may be accidental (backhoes or ship anchors severing buried fiber), natural (hurricanes or earthquakes), or internet shut downs<sup>122</sup>. Example of cases are as follows:

### Internet disruption: Case of South Africa

In South Africa at approximately 2:20 p.m. UTC on January 21, 2016 Akamai identified<sup>123</sup> traffic levels to South Africa suddenly dip by about

40%. Traffic remained at reduced levels for about two hours, until roughly 4:30 p.m. UTC. Dyn Research<sup>124</sup>, the Internet monitoring arm of Internet performance company Dyn, corroborated the outage, noting that roughly 20% of network prefixes were down in South Africa as part of a larger set of outages throughout the African continent.<sup>125</sup>

According to African cable operator Seacom, these outages were due to construction activity in Egypt leading to multiple damaged cables, which caused connectivity problems for the entire continent as Seacom's<sup>126</sup> cables in and around Egypt provide connectivity for much of Africa to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

### Internet disruption: Case of Zimbabwe

In January 2019 there was total internet shutdown in Zimbabwe. According to Econet founder Strive Masiyiwa in January 2019<sup>127</sup> his network had taken down internet services across Zimbabwe on government orders. The shutdown was lifted after a court order on application by MISA-Zimbabwe<sup>128</sup> challenging the legality of the internet shutdown. The verdict meant that

118 Chapter II subsection 12: Protection of freedom of expression : [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---ilo\\_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms\\_125669.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_125669.pdf), <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Botswana-2018.pdf>

119 The law states, "Any person in a public place or at a public gathering (who) uses abusive, obscene, or insulting language in relation to the president, any other member of the National Assembly, or any public officer" is guilty of an offense and may be fined up to 400 pula (\$38). The penal code also states that any person who insults the country's coat of arms, flag, presidential standard, or national anthem is guilty of an offense and may be fined up to 500 pula (\$47) : <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Insult%20Law%20Report.pdf>

120 <http://www.elaws.gov.bw/displaylrpage.php?id=1712&dsp=2>

121 <http://www.elaws.gov.bw/displaylrpage.php?id=1712&dsp=2>

122 An internet shutdown happens when someone — usually a government — intentionally disrupts the internet or mobile apps to control what people say or do. Shutdowns are also sometimes called "blackouts" or "kill switches." Here's a more technical definition developed by experts: "An internet shutdown is an intentional disruption of internet or electronic communications, rendering them inaccessible or effectively unusable, for a specific population or within a location, often to exert control over the flow of information." - <https://www.accessnow.org/keepiton/>

123 <https://www.akamai.com/uk/en/multimedia/documents/state-of-the-internet/akamai-state-of-the-internet-report-q1-2016.pdf>

124 <https://hub.dyn.com/dyn-research>

125 <https://twitter.com/bgpmon/status/690211672779202560>

126 <https://www.itweb.co.za/content/IP3gQ2qG4w9vnRD1#VqVVDm6LLXQ.twitter>

127 <https://www.pazimbabwe.com/business-49830-strive-masiyiwa-admits-shutting-down-internet-and-social-media-in-zimbabwe.html>

128 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-zimbabwe-politics/zimbabwe-court-says-internet-shutdown-during-protests-was-illegal-idUSKCN1P-F11M>

mobile network operators and Internet service providers had to restore full Internet access including access to social media applications and websites. Access to Applications<sup>129</sup> such as WhatsApp and Facebook had been restricted since the morning of Tuesday 15 January 2019<sup>130</sup>.

Despite the verdict, in the same month a government Deputy Minister<sup>131</sup> went on to warn that government would not hesitate to shut down the Internet again if need arises and claimed Zimbabweans were primitive and have no understanding of their constitutional rights.

During that same time, other key sources of information were also under attack, there were 10 cases reported alleging attacks of journalists by army and police officers. It was reported<sup>132</sup> that soldiers and police in riot gear detained and harassed 7 journalists in Harare despite having produced their press cards. It was also reported that 3 journalists were assaulted in Bulawayo by soldiers whilst filming the protests and the subsequent violence.

### Internet disruption: Case of DRC

In August 2017, the day before a two-day protest organized by the opposition calling on people

across the country to stay at home as a way of advocating for the publication of an electoral calendar, the Post and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority ordered telecommunication companies to strictly limit all social media activity and communication.<sup>133</sup> The president of the DRC telecommunications authority<sup>134</sup> sent a letter to telecoms companies that provide internet services in the country. It read: “To prevent abusive sharing of images through social media between clients of your network, I ask you to take the necessary technical measures to restrict the capacity to transfer images to the bare minimum.”

### Social media surveillance<sup>135</sup> tracking

Another key threat to social media use is the increase in social media surveillance<sup>136</sup> in the region. Several of regions governments, such as, the Zambian<sup>137</sup>, South African, Angolan and Zimbabwean<sup>138</sup> governments<sup>139</sup> — have been reported to have sought Chinese assistance<sup>140</sup> in monitoring their country’s digital communications networks.

Governments are increasingly purchasing sophisticated technology to monitor their citizens’ behavior on social media<sup>141</sup>. The booming

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129 <https://ooni.org/post/zimbabwe-protests-social-media-blocking-2019/>

130 <https://www.accessnow.org/zimbabwe-orders-a-three-day-country-wide-internet-shutdown/>

131 Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services deputy minister Energy Mutodi

<https://www.newsday.co.zw/2019/01/govt-wont-hesitate-shutting-down-internet-again-mutodi/>

132 <http://www.hrforumzim.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Shutdown-Atrocities-Report-6-February-2019.pdf>

133 <https://www.refworld.org/topic,50fbce582,50fbce5be,5a993918a,0,AMNESTY,ANNUALREPORT,COD.html>

134 <https://www.refworld.org/topic,50fbce582,50fbce5be,598add634,0,AMNESTY,COD.html>

135 Social media surveillance refers to the collection and processing of personal data pulled from digital communication platforms, often through automated technology that allows for real-time aggregation, organization, and analysis of large amounts of metadata and content. Broader in scope than spyware, which intercepts communications by targeting specific individuals’ devices, social media surveillance cannot be dismissed as less invasive.

136 <https://advocx.globalvoices.org/2014/02/26/digital-surveillance-in-angola-and-other-less-important-african-countries/>

137 [http://www.freedomhouse.org/cmb/82\\_030713#5](http://www.freedomhouse.org/cmb/82_030713#5)

138 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2012/zimbabwe>

139 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/07/30/africas-big-brother-lives-in-beijing/>

140 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2012/zimbabwe>

141 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-on-the-net/2019/the-crisis-of-social-media/social-media-surveillance>

commercial market for social media surveillance<sup>142</sup> has lowered the cost of entry not only for the security services, where it is being used with little oversight or accountability.<sup>143</sup> This growing employment of social media surveillance threatens to squeeze the space for freedom of expression and access to information, including civic activism on social media.

Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have opened up new possibilities for automated mass surveillance.<sup>144</sup> Advanced monitoring systems<sup>145</sup> are able to map users' relationships through link analysis; attribute meaning to their social media posts using natural-language processing and sentiment analysis<sup>146</sup>; and infer their past, present, or future locations. Whether accurate or inaccurate<sup>147</sup>, the conclusions made about an individual can have serious repercussions, particularly in countries<sup>148</sup> where one's political views and social interactions can lead to closer scrutiny and outright punishment<sup>149</sup>.

Zambia, South Africa and Mozambique are examples of countries in the region that have been identified in 2018 as part of the 45 countries that were using and/or targeted for spying

and tracking using the NSO Group's Pegasus<sup>150</sup> Spyware.<sup>151</sup>

### **Social media risk<sup>152</sup> : Government attitudes**

Social media threats and risk commonly refers to any risk of financial loss, disruption or damage to the reputation on, through or based on social media. The risk could materialize in a variety of ways, such as: deliberate and unauthorized breaches of security to gain access to information systems, fake news, unintentional or accidental breaches of security and poor system integrity. Governments within the region have identified and made public pronouncements on social media risk(s), though some of the estimates are not in alignment with international best practices and standards for digital rights, for example:

#### **Social media risk identification - Case of Angola**

The President of Angola in an opening speech of the Angotic 2018<sup>153</sup> highlighted that

“Social networks, which have come to facilitate quick communication between people and whose use, especially by young people, we encourage and discourage, also hide some dangers, due to the possibility that authors and

142 Ibid definition 84 above

143 Ibid

144 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/09/17/global-expansion-of-ai-surveillance-pub-79847>

145 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2090447914000550>

146 <https://monkeylearn.com/sentiment-analysis/>

147 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/09/17/global-expansion-of-ai-surveillance-pub-79847>

148 <https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/interactive/ai-surveillance>

149 Ibid

150 Israel-based “Cyber Warfare” vendor NSO Group produces and sells a mobile phone spyware suite called Pegasus. To monitor a target, a government operator of Pegasus must convince the target to click on a specially crafted exploit link, which, when clicked, delivers a chain of zero-day exploits to penetrate security features on the phone and installs Pegasus without the user's knowledge or permission. Once the phone is exploited and Pegasus is installed, it begins contacting the operator's command and control (C&C) servers to receive and execute operators' commands, and send back the target's private data, including passwords, contact lists, calendar events, text messages, and live voice calls from popular mobile messaging apps. The operator can even turn on the phone's camera and microphone to capture activity in the phone's vicinity. See: <https://citizenlab.ca/2018/09/hide-and-see-tracking-nso-groups-pegasus-spyware-to-operations-in-45-countries/>

151 <https://citizenlab.ca/2018/09/hide-and-see-tracking-nso-groups-pegasus-spyware-to-operations-in-45-countries/>

152 <https://www.rswebsols.com/tutorials/internet/privacy-security-risks-social-media>

153 President Angola João Lourenço, in the opening speech of the Angotic 2018 forum, which takes place in Luanda, dedicated to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

broadcasters of certain media content hide in anonymity or in the use of false identity, which can make it difficult to identify and consequently be responsible for the damages caused.”<sup>154</sup>

These sentiments highlighted clearly not only the perception by the Angolan President on social media use but also the potential risks that are associated with social media which include reliance on anonymity to commit offence.

### **Social media risk identification - Case of Zimbabwe**

According to a Zimbabwean Government Minister<sup>155</sup>

“Citizen Journalism characterized by people freely generating information and sharing it, removes the editorial responsibility and self-restraint that you find in traditional media because purveyors of social media information often operate extra-territorially out of reach from the societies they offend against. You thus find all types of information circulating on social media, including fake news, some of it designed to create fissures in the nation state because those responsible are out of reach of national laws.”

### **Social media risk identification - Case of Zambia**

According to Zambian government social media platforms, have both positive and negative aspects that can be attributed to individuals and organisations.<sup>156</sup> One of the major challenge is culture loss<sup>157</sup> “....Zambian digital culture is foreign and places the nation’s cultural, social and economic wellbeing at risk.” Also on the increase are crimes impersonation<sup>158</sup> “... there have recorded incidents of impersonations from a small group of people. They are insulting everyone on social media and other platforms. They are also falsely accusing and or defrauding people on social media platforms.” At the same time Fraud<sup>159</sup> is on the increase “... Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA) in collaboration with the Zambia Police Service has, in the recent past, recorded an upswing in the number of cases known as affinity fraud cases.” “...to date, a total of thirty four cases have been flagged with over 627 victims.”

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154 <https://observador.pt/2018/06/19/presidente-angolano-quer-baixar-custos-e-melhorar-fiabilidade-nas-telecomunicacoes/>

155 Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services Minister Monica Mutsvangwa remarks while presenting a paper on “Information as a threat to national security” at the Zimbabwe National Defence University (ZNDU) in Harare, January, 2019.  
See: <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/minister-calls-for-laws-regulating-social-media/>

156 Thursday, 5 July, 2018 1 Ministerial Statement on the Electronic and Social Media Platforms by the Hon. Minister of Transport and Communication, Mr. Mushimba. [http://www.parliament.gov.zm/sites/default/files/images/publication\\_docs/MINISTERIAL%20STATEMENT%20BY%20THE%20HON.%20MINISTER%20OF%20TRANS.%20AND%20COM.%20MR%20MUSHIMBA,%20ON%20SOCIAL%20MEDIA\\_0.pdf](http://www.parliament.gov.zm/sites/default/files/images/publication_docs/MINISTERIAL%20STATEMENT%20BY%20THE%20HON.%20MINISTER%20OF%20TRANS.%20AND%20COM.%20MR%20MUSHIMBA,%20ON%20SOCIAL%20MEDIA_0.pdf)

157ibid

158ibid

159ibid

# Recommendations for Improved social media use:

## **Free internet and/or zero rating**

Affordable access to broadband networks is a necessary condition for improved social media use. Some MNOs' are zero-rating over-the-top (OTT) services, limited as this practice is at present, it has been said to provide a gateway to the Internet for first-time and price-sensitive users<sup>160</sup>. Additionally, when the practice is deployed by non-dominant MNOs, zero-rating has been argued to enhance competition.<sup>161</sup>

Others have urged that regions' MNOs' zero-rating practices raise the potentially negative unintended consequences that can arise from instrumentally regulating complex, adaptive systems that today drive innovation within the information and communications technology (ICT) ecosystem in Africa.<sup>162</sup>

There is also another argument that zero-rating fosters discrimination among providers of online content and content applications in ways that may skew incentives for low-income/poor subscribers, such that users may choose to access the "free" services of identified partners instead of the services of competing providers.<sup>163</sup>

As an example, in 2014 Zambia was the first<sup>164</sup> African country to implement Facebook's Free Basics<sup>165</sup> initiative that allows users to access prescribed sites without the need for data. Free-Facebook<sup>166</sup>, in partnership with Facebook, MTN Zambia launched Facebook Flex, a service

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160 <https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/FreeAccessIP3-Online.pdf>

161 [https://researchictafrica.net/publications/Other\\_publications/2016\\_RIA\\_Zero-Rating\\_Policy\\_Paper\\_-\\_Much\\_ado\\_about\\_nothing.pdf](https://researchictafrica.net/publications/Other_publications/2016_RIA_Zero-Rating_Policy_Paper_-_Much_ado_about_nothing.pdf)

162 *ibid*

163 *ibid*

164 <https://cipesa.org/2017/05/zambias-mixed-record-on-ict-access-and-free-expression-online/>

165 <http://www.internet.org/>

166 <https://www.techrends.co.zm/mtn-zambia-launches-free-facebook-flex/>



that allows subscribers on the MTN network to access Facebook for free<sup>167</sup>

Beyond zero rating, some organisations and governments are also providing free internet access for example in Luanda Angola there are over 9 000<sup>168</sup>, free Wi-Fi hotspots.

### Internet exchange points (IXPs)

IXPs are a critical component of the Internet ecosystem where Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and Content Delivery Networks (CDNs) interconnect directly rather than through one or more third-party networks to exchange local traffic with each other.<sup>169</sup>

This results in low latency, cost and bandwidth-saving (less dependence on international links) on Internet access to the Internet Users<sup>170</sup>. SADC Member States have established at least one National IXP (NIXP)<sup>171</sup>. An example is the Angonix – an IXP based in Luanda – has

grown exponentially to become the third largest African IXP, with peak traffic of 10.8 Gbps (as recorded in July 2017).<sup>172</sup> In that regard, internet exchange points should be considered more in the SADC region so as to promote internet access and subsequently social media use for free expression and access to information.

### Social media without internet

There are service providers now offering social media access through USSD / SMS text. For example, in Zimbabwe Facebook on USSD service has been launched through Econet.<sup>173</sup> With this service any handset can be used to access the social network by dialing \*325# The service which is being targeted mainly at Econet's prepaid customers is meant as a "Facebooking" option<sup>174</sup> for subscribers who do not have data enabled devices, are sensitive to the high costs of data or access internet service at restricted times of the day only (The workplace Wi-Fi users for instance)<sup>175</sup>.

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167 <https://www.techrends.co.zm/mtn-zambia-launches-free-facebook-flex/>

168 <https://www.wiman.me/angola>

169 <https://au.int/sw/node/31361>

170 *ibid*

171 <https://www.af-ix.net/ixps-list>

172 <https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/7/16/166368.html>

173 <https://www.techzim.co.zw/2014/07/econet-launch-facebook-ussd/>

174 <https://www.techzim.co.zw/2019/01/the-facebook-by-sms-service-from-econet-could-help-at-time-like-this-but-its-giving-a-weird-final-step/>

175 <https://www.techzim.co.zw/2011/03/new-econet-service-powered-by-etxt/>

# Social Media use vis-à-vis electoral processes

There is an increasing presence of reliance on social media within political campaigns and electoral processes across the region. Election candidates have relied on platforms like Twitter and Facebook to engage with the electorate and unpack their manifestos in a bid to solicit for votes. However, a Portland study<sup>176</sup> found that the majority (53%) of the leading voices on Twitter around African elections, held over the years, came from outside the country in which the elections were contested. Despite the aforementioned, the following are examples from within the region of social media use during elections.

## **Social Media and elections: Case of Zambia**

The defining era in Zambia's current rise in online political and civic activism<sup>177</sup> can be traced back to the period between 2011 and 2013<sup>178</sup>. This is when the late President Sata embraced social media as part of his political and public diplomacy strategy. In the 2016 General Elections, government, its agencies, such as the

Election Commission of Zambia (ECZ), the opposition and civil society were all immersed in social media.<sup>179</sup>

## **Social Media and elections: Case of Zimbabwe**

In Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) is lobbying government to block social media in future elections and alleges these platforms were responsible for “releasing toxic information” during the 2018 elections and more specifically on disputed polls.<sup>180</sup>

According to the Zimbabwe Independent, a Zimbabwean local newspaper, “Social media has basically eroded the influence of legacy media which has worked in favour of ZANU PF since it controls the state media — ZimPapers and ZBC — with the only television in the country and an array of radio stations”<sup>181</sup>. It can therefore be noted that social media has provided campaigning platforms for opposition media who more often than not were sidelined by State owned or controlled media.

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176 <https://portland-communications.com/pdf/News-Release-How-Africa-Tweets-2018.pdf>

177 Arthur Gwagwa et al. Moral Code in Cyberspace in Zambia. A Comparative Documentation of Internet-based information control systems, policies and practices in Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Swaziland. Strathmore University. 2016

178 [https://cipesa.org/?wpfb\\_dl=219](https://cipesa.org/?wpfb_dl=219)

179 Arthur Gwagwa et al. Moral Code in Cyberspace in Zambia. A Comparative Documentation of Internet-based information control systems, policies and practices in Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Swaziland. Strathmore University. 2016

180 Tauri Gavi, ZEC director for voter education, said, “We need serious regulation of social media by way of a law and ZEC is going to lobby parliamentarians to ensure such a piece of legislation is put in place ahead of the 2023 elections.” Gavi claimed the absence of a regulation to deal with social media resulted in meddling in the electoral process. “The social media literally spread poison by way of several misconceptions and lies during the election,” <http://zimtechreview.co.zw/index-id-News-story-1121.html>

181 <https://www.theindependent.co.zw/2018/07/27/social-media-new-political-battlefield/>



The influence of social media on politics is also seen in its use to spread propaganda and in one Zimbabwean newspaper it was reported that the President ‘unleashed’ ZANU PF youths to dominate social media.<sup>182</sup> During the 2018 elections, Zimbabwe witnessed what can be rightly termed an online war between *varakashi*<sup>183</sup> and the *nerrorists*<sup>184</sup> characterized by the spread of propaganda to support one’s political party and discredit opposition.<sup>185</sup>

Furthermore, according to remarks by Zimbabwe information Minister,<sup>186</sup>

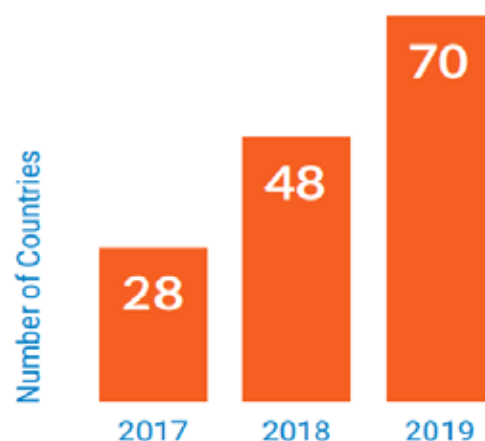
“We have also seen, especially during important events such as national elections or crises, social media being used to attack sovereignty, national security, promote commotion and violence by whipping emotions mostly through the dissemination of fake information. Zimbabwe has not been spared, with social media information being used by detractors of the State during the general elections of 2018 to spread falsehoods that had potential to cause national instability.”

### Social media manipulation during elections

There is a significant rise in organized social media manipulation within the region, for example there was a 150% the increase in countries using organized social media manipulation

campaigns 2017 to 2019<sup>187</sup>, as shown figure 12 below:

Figure 12: Social media manipulation



Source: Oxford Internet Institute: Comprop<sup>188</sup>

Despite there being more social networking platforms than ever, Facebook remains the platform of choice for social media manipulation. The 2019 Oxford Internet Institute Report found evidence of formally organized computational propaganda campaigns on Facebook.

### Case of Cyber troops

Cyber troops are defined<sup>189</sup> as government or political party actors tasked with manipulating

182 <https://www.zimeye.net/2018/03/09/mnangagwa-unleashes-social-media-cyber-attack-dogs-against-opponents/>

183 Varakashi meaning destroyers and referring to supporters of the ruling party ZANU-PF

184 Nerrorists meaning supporters of opposition party named after the leader Nelson Chamisa popularly identified as Nerro

185 <https://theconversation.com/a-vicious-online-propaganda-war-that-includes-fake-news-is-being-waged-in-zimbabwe-99402>

186 Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services Minister Monica Mutsvangwa remarks while presenting a paper on “Information as a threat to national security” at the Zimbabwe National Defence University (ZNDU) in Harare, January, 2019. <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/minister-calls-for-laws-regulating-social-media/>

187 <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2019/09/CyberTroop-Report19.pdf>

188 <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2019/09/CyberTroop-Report19.pdf>

189 Bradshaw and Howard 2017a. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2056305119863147>

public opinion online. Formal organization of cyber troops around the world, use computational propaganda for political purposes. This involves building an inventory of the evolving strategies, tools, and techniques of computational propaganda, including the use of 'political bots' to amplify hate speech or other forms of manipulated content, the illegal harvesting of data or micro-targeting, or deploying an army of 'trolls' to bully or harass political dissidents or journalists online.

### **Social media computational propaganda**

The use of computational propaganda to shape public attitudes via social media has become mainstream, extending far beyond the actions of a few bad actors. In an information environment characterized by high volumes of information and limited levels of user attention and trust, the tools and techniques of computational propaganda are becoming a common and arguably essential part of digital campaigning and public diplomacy.

### **Social media propaganda - Communication Strategies**

Cyber troops are using a variety of communication strategies, which may be categorized into the following:

- (a) the creation of disinformation or manipulated media;
- (b) mass-reporting of content or accounts;
- (c) data-driven strategies;

- (d) trolling, doxing or harassment;
- (e) amplifying content and media online.<sup>190</sup>

The creation of disinformation or manipulated media is the most common communication strategy. Over half of the countries in the region, cyber troops actively created content such as memes, videos, and fake news websites or manipulated media in order to mislead users. Sometimes, the content created by cyber troops is targeted at specific communities or segments of users. By using online and offline sources of data about users, and paying for advertisements on popular social media platforms, some cyber troops target specific communities with disinformation or manipulated media.

Cyber troops use a variety of messaging and valence strategies when communicating with users online. The typology of messaging strategies that cyber troops use when engaging in conversations with users online:

- (a) spreading pro-government or pro-party propaganda;
- (b) attacking the opposition or mounting smear campaigns;
- (c) distracting or diverting conversations or criticism away from important issues;
- (d) driving division and polarization; and
- (e) suppressing participation through personal attacks or harassment.

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190 Herring, Susan C. 2009. Web Content Analysis: Expanding the Paradigm. In *International Handbook of Internet Research*, eds. Jeremy Hunsinger, Lisbeth Klastrup, and Matthew Allen. Springer Netherlands, 233–49. [http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4020-9789-8\\_14](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4020-9789-8_14) (May 1, 2020).

### **Social media propaganda - Account Types**

Fake accounts are used by cyber troops to spread computational propaganda. There<sup>191</sup> is a growing prevalence of three types of fake accounts: bot<sup>192</sup>, human, and cyborg<sup>193</sup>. The accounts are often used to amplify narratives or drown out political dissent. More common than bots are human-run accounts, which do not make use of automation. Instead they engage in conversations by posting comments or tweets, or by private messaging individuals via social media platforms.

There is also presence of hacked or stolen accounts within the typology of fake accounts. Although these accounts are not 'fake' per se, high profile accounts are strategically used by cyber troops in order to spread pro-government propaganda or to censor freedom of

speech by revoking access to the account by its rightful owner. A small number of state actors have begun using stolen or hacked accounts as part of their campaigns, highlighting the interconnectivity of computational propaganda with more traditional forms of cyber-attacks.

Finally, it is important to note that not all accounts used in cyber troop activities are fake. In some countries, state actors encourage cyber troops to use their real accounts to spread pro-government propaganda, troll political dissidents, or mass-report content. As social media companies become more aggressive in taking down accounts associated with cyber troop activity, the co-option of real accounts could become a more prominent strategy.<sup>194</sup>

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191 <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2017/07/Troops-Trolls-and-Troublemakers.pdf>

192 Bots are highly automated accounts designed to mimic human behaviour online

193 Cyborg accounts, which blend automation with human curation, are another account type we identified

194 Joyce, Mary, Rosas Antonio, and Philip N. Howard. 2013. Global Digital Activism Data Set. <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/34625/version/2>.

# Social media law and policy inconsistencies

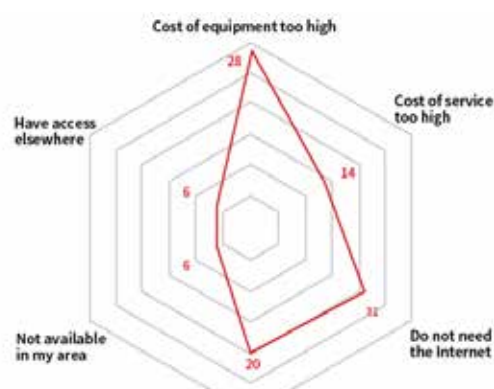
Governments in the region have also been showing inconsistencies in their regulation of social media use. For example, in July 2018 the Zambian government said it had no plans of introducing a levy on cyber space on social media highlighting that Zambia has adequate laws binding the cyber space to benefit the Zambian people.<sup>195</sup> In January of the same year, the same Minister<sup>196</sup> had highlighted that three bills were being introduced in Parliament, to support productive use of internet and social media being the cyber security and cyber-crime bill, e-commerce bill and data protection bill.<sup>197</sup>

The same was seen during reporting of abuse for example Xenophobia<sup>198</sup> on social media, but the deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Catherine Namugala ruled that the Zambian Government will not run its affairs based on information on social media. This was after leader of the opposition Jack Mwiimbu raised a point of order to ask what Government was doing to protect its nationals in South Africa, following xenophobic information circulating on social media.

## Barriers to access to social media

In general, the limited use of social media in the region is also attributed to the lack of internet access. The subsequent barriers to Internet use within households<sup>199</sup> connectivity include lack of coverage, absence of Internet-enabled devices, and cost of the Internet in terms of connections, services and digital literacy as shown below in figure 13 below:

Figure 13: Barriers to internet use



Source: After Access<sup>200</sup>

195 July 5 2018 , In a ministerial statement in parliament. <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2018/07/05/zambia-will-not-introduce-tax-on-social-media-mushimba/>

196 Communications Minister Brain Mushimba

197 <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2018/01/27/government-introduce-laws-social-media-misuse/>

198 <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2017/11/01/zambian-government-will-not-run-affairs-based-information-social-media-namugala/>

199 RIA After Access survey data, 2017

200 RIA After Access survey data, 2017

### Barriers to internet access:

Main reasons why the household does not have Internet in the region are as show in figure 14 below:

Figure 14: Barriers to internet access:

COUNTRIES	COST OF EQUIPMENT TOO HIGH	COST OF SERVICE TOO HIGH	DO NOT NEED THE INTERNET	HAVE ACCESS TO THE INTERNET ELSEWHERE	NOT AVAILABLE IN MY AREA	DO NOT KNOW HOW TO USE IT	PRIVACY OR SECURITY CONCERNS
South Africa	24%	27%	19%	6%	4%	13%	1%
Mozambique	61%	14%	3%	2%	4%	6%	
Lesotho	21%	6%	15%	17%	7%	35%	

Source: Own chart from After Access<sup>201</sup> data

### Cost as a barrier to social media use

A higher cost of mobile access has a greater impact on the lowest earners, as it constitutes a higher share of their monthly income. Therefore, addressing affordability issues is key to achieving greater digital inclusion including increased subscriber penetration and the extension of mobile services to the unconnected and also social media usage across the region.

### Taxation as contributor to cost as a barrier to social media

Consumer taxes such as sales taxes, custom duties and activation taxes directly raise retail prices for consumers to use social media. Meanwhile, the extent to which mobile operator taxes and fees ultimately fall on the operator or consumer depends on the type of tax and market conditions. Some taxes and fees may be absorbed by operators in the form of lower profits (thus negatively impacting investment), while others may be passed through in terms of higher prices for consumers,

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<sup>201</sup> RIA After Access survey data, 2017

which impacts affordability. There may be a combination of the two as shown in figure 15 below:

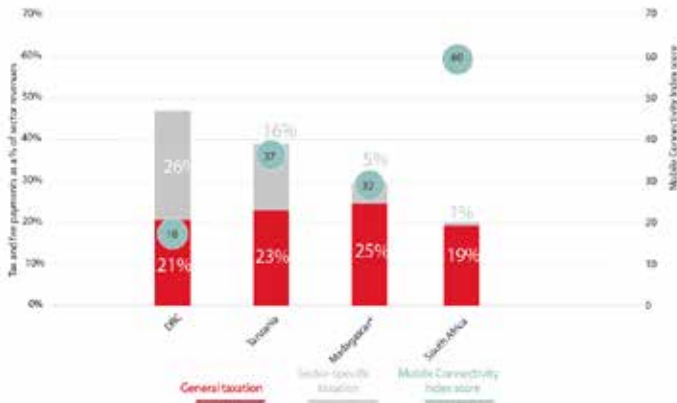
Figure 15: Taxation\* Sector-specific<sup>202</sup>

TAXES ON CONSUMERS		OPERATOR TAXES AND FEES	
Tax base	Tax type	Tax base	Tax type
Handsets and other devices	Sales tax	Profits	Corporation tax
	Sector-specific taxes	Revenues	Turnover tax
	Customs duty	Other revenue taxes	
Services	Customs duty	Network equipment	Customs duty
	Activation	Fixed amounts	* One-off licence fee
	Sector-specific taxes		* One-off spectrum fee
	Usage	Revenues	* Universal service obligation
	Sales tax		* Variable licence fee
	Sector-specific taxes		* Variable spectrum fee

Source: GSMA<sup>203</sup>

Figure 16 below shows some levels of taxation in selected regional countries:

Figure 16: Taxation

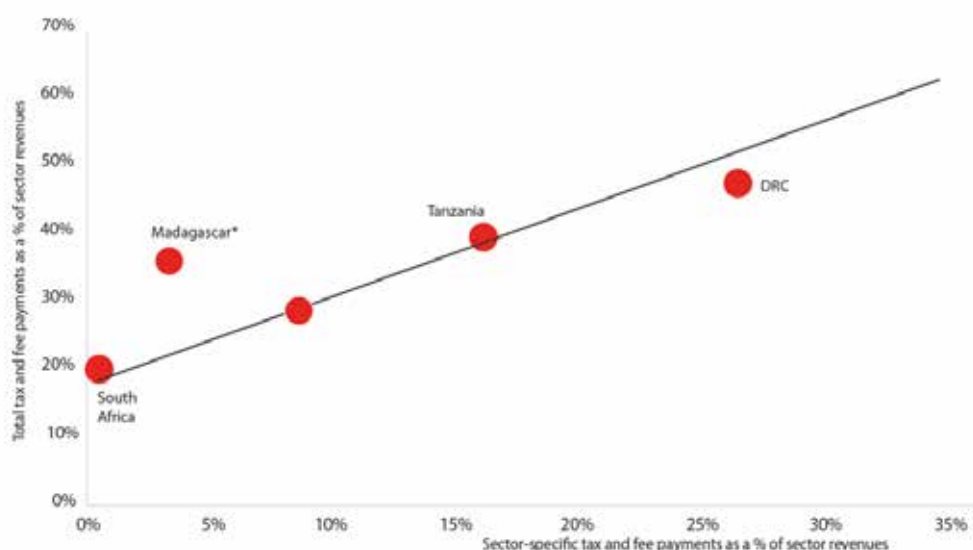


202 Source: GSMA Intelligence, Deloitte/GSMA 2015: Digital inclusion and mobile sector taxation 2015 :gsma.com  
203 ibid

Comment<sup>204</sup> **Source:** Own chart from GSMA Intelligence<sup>205</sup> data

Revenue share of sector-specific versus total tax and fees is shown in figure 17 below for selected countries in the region:

Figure 16: Revenue share of sector-specific versus total tax and fees



**Source:** Own chart from GSMA Intelligence<sup>206</sup> data

In part as a result of sector-specific taxation, the mobile industry in the region often makes a larger contribution to government tax revenues relative to its size in the economy. Within the sample of countries for which data is available, the contribution of the mobile sector to government tax revenue is estimated to be 2.7× the industry's revenue share of GDP on average.<sup>207</sup> This compares to a ratio of 1.8× based on available tax payment data for 15 (mainly developing) countries outside Sub-Saharan Africa.

204 DRC, Madagascar, Niger, South Africa and Tanzania. Note that payments data for Madagascar is from 2014 rather than 2015 and that the 2014 data does not include tax payments related to spectrum fees.

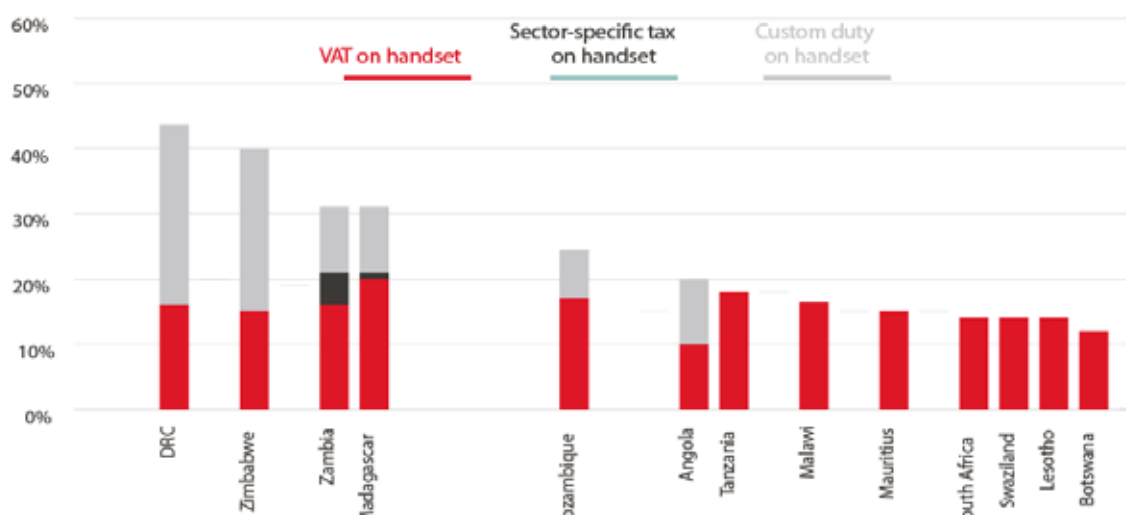
205 Countries that have a higher level of tax and fee payments as a proportion of sector revenues tend to have relatively low levels of readiness for mobile internet connectivity. This is illustrated through comparison with the GSMA Mobile Connectivity Index, which benchmarks 134 countries against four key enablers that are critical to creating the right conditions for mobile internet connectivity to flourish: • infrastructure: the availability of high-performance mobile internet network coverage • affordability: the availability of mobile services and devices at price points that reflect the level of income across a national population • consumer readiness: citizens with the awareness and skills needed to value and use the internet and a cultural environment that promotes gender equality • content: the availability of online content and services that are accessible and relevant to the local population.

206 [https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Taxing-mobile-connectivity-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa\\_July-2017.pdf](https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Taxing-mobile-connectivity-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa_July-2017.pdf)

207 ibid

Another key barrier is handset tax. First, consumers need to purchase a device that is generally subject to VAT and customs duties but often also sector-specific taxes on handsets – all of which serve to increase the device acquisition cost and the cost of accessing mobile services.<sup>208</sup> Combined handset tax rates in 2016 for selected countries in the region are as shown in figure 17 below:

Figure 17: Tax on handsets distribution



Source: Own chart from GSMA<sup>209</sup> data

While an increasing number of countries have introduced tax exemptions on importing handsets over the last decade, as of 2016 handset taxes on average still accounted for 23% of the final cost of handsets.<sup>210</sup> Second, another level is taxation on usage as shown in figure 18 below:

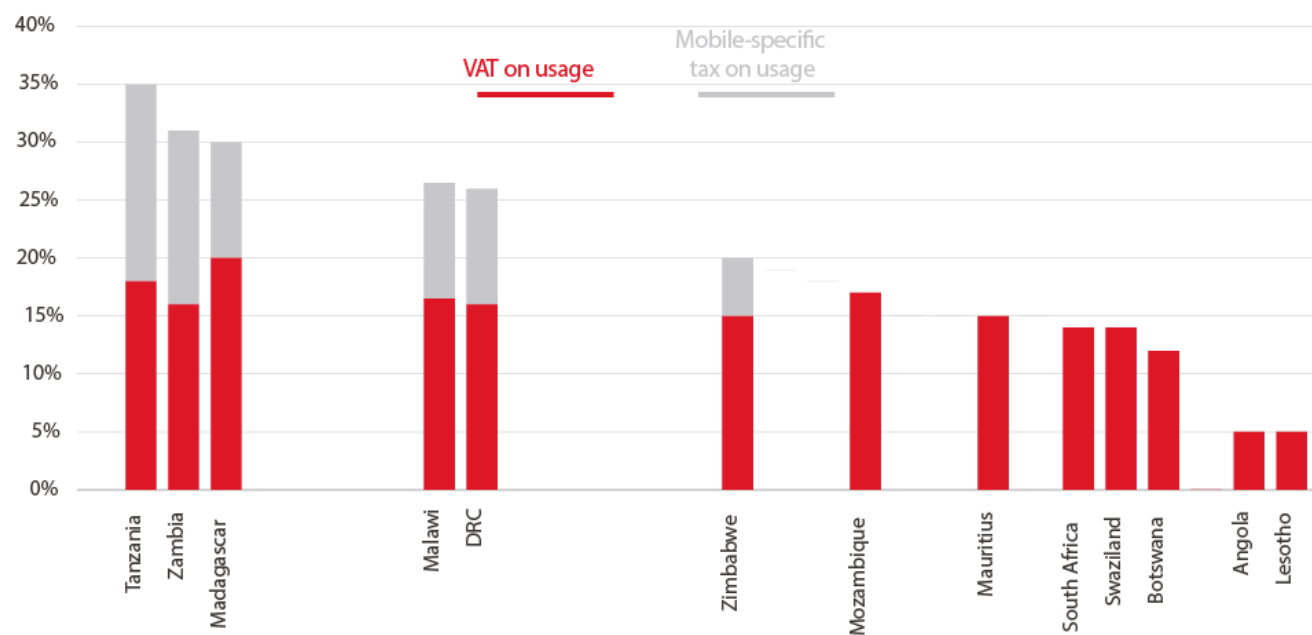
208 ibid

209 [https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Taxing-mobile-connectivity-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa\\_July-2017.pdf](https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Taxing-mobile-connectivity-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa_July-2017.pdf)

210 ibid



Figure 18: Level of taxation

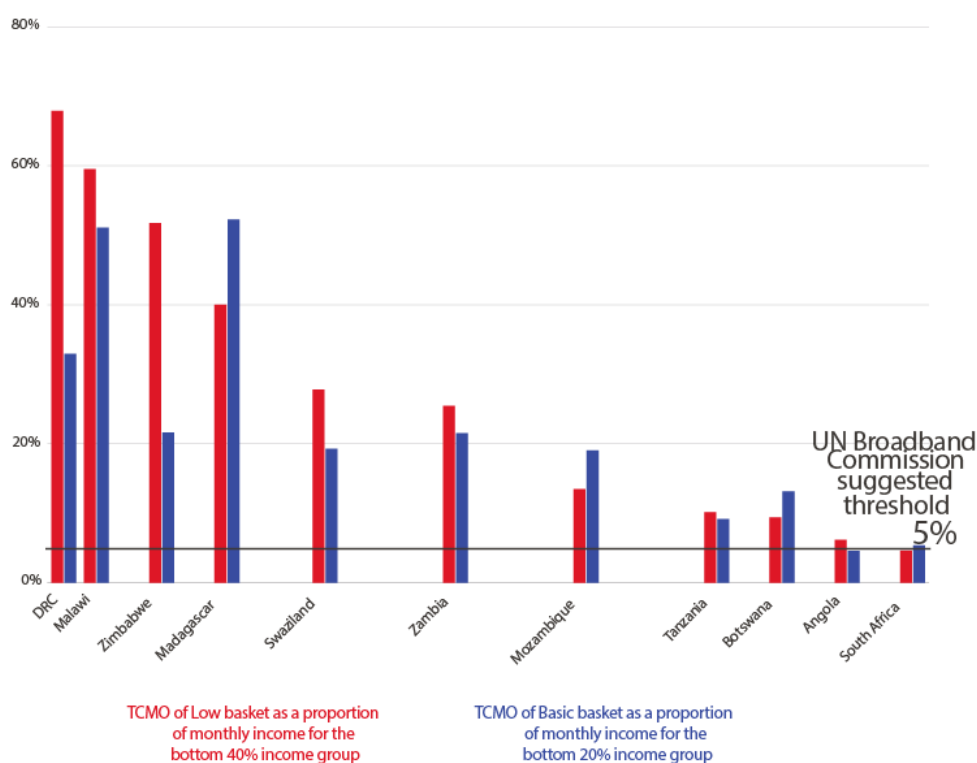


Source: Own chart from GSMA<sup>211</sup> data

211 ibid

Thirdly, the total cost of mobile ownership (TCMO)<sup>212</sup> in the region is also high as shown in figure 19 below:

Figure 19: Total cost of mobile ownership



Source: Own chart from GSMA<sup>213</sup> data

Analysis<sup>214</sup> of the Low basket (500 MB) for countries in the region shows that in 2016 the TCMO represented on average 10% of monthly income in countries where data is available. However, for those in the bottom 40% income group, the average share of income is 25% and reaches as high as 68% in the DRC. To put this in context with more mature mobile markets, the equivalent share of TCMO in income for a selection of Western European countries is 0.7% for the bottom 40% income groups and

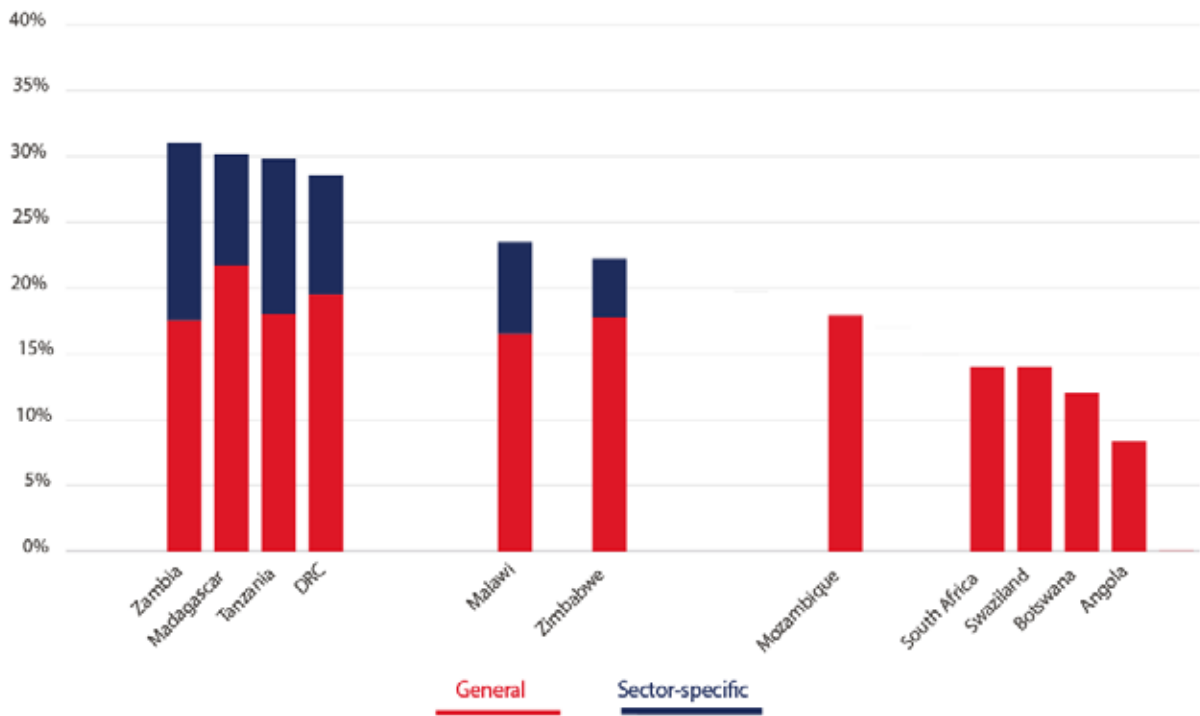
212 Summary of monthly usage baskets used for calculation of TCMO : GSMA : [https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Taxing-mobile-connectivity-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa\\_July-2017.pdf](https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Taxing-mobile-connectivity-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa_July-2017.pdf)

213 [https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Taxing-mobile-connectivity-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa\\_July-2017.pdf](https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Taxing-mobile-connectivity-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa_July-2017.pdf)

214 ibid

0.4% for the entire population<sup>215</sup>. The UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development suggests a 5% threshold of income for the cost of a 500 MB per month mobile broadband bundle. This implies that the average TCMO for the Low basket in the region is approximately five times the suggested threshold and is thus unaffordable for consumers in the bottom 40% income group in the region.<sup>216</sup>

Figure 20: Tax as a proportion of TCMO (Low basket) in 2016



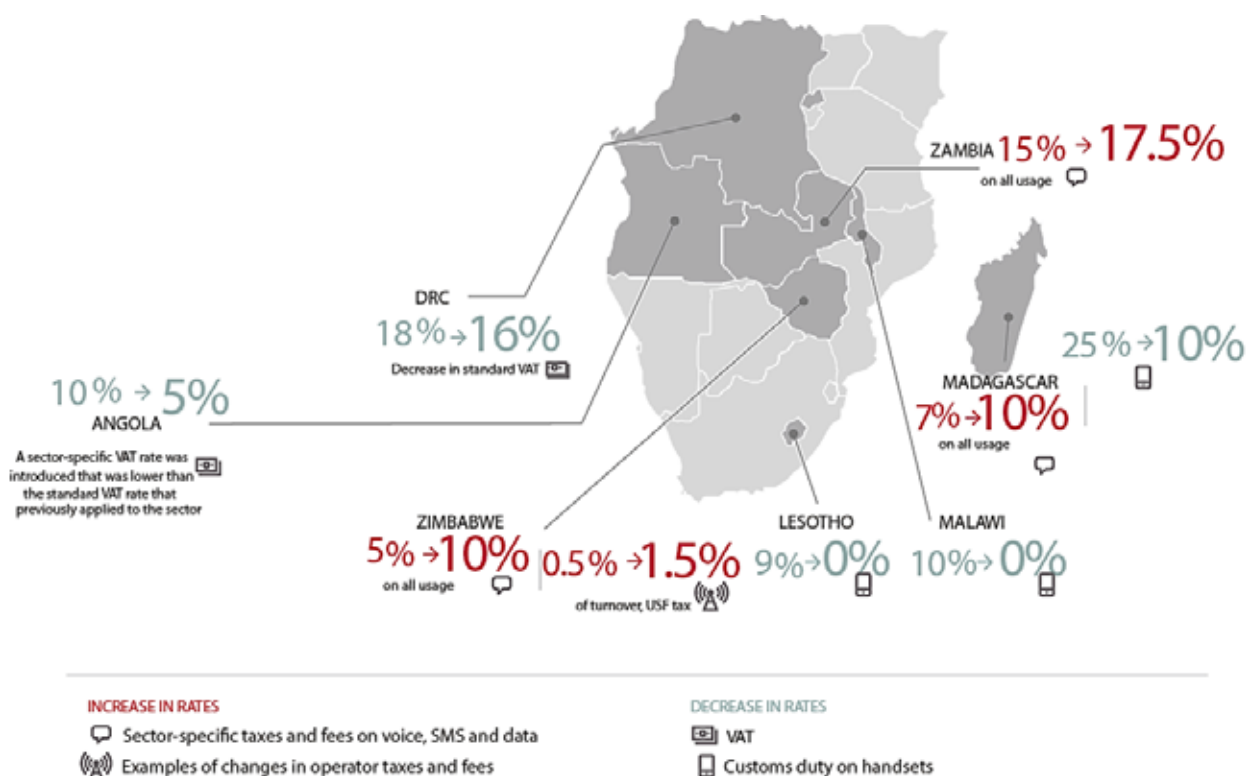
Source: Own chart from GSMA<sup>217</sup> data

215 ibid  
216 ibid  
217 ibid

## Tax reform

A number of countries in the region have embarked in tax reform over the years as shown in 21 below:

Figure 21: Tax<sup>218</sup> reform for mobile services in the region (2011–2016)<sup>219</sup>



Source: Own map from GSMA<sup>220</sup> data

There is a negative correlation between higher taxes and mobile penetration. Removing non-VAT mobile specific taxes will increase the affordability of mobile services and boost penetration<sup>221</sup> as

218 <https://www.gsma.com/publicpolicy/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/taxgrowthsubsaharanafrica.pdf>

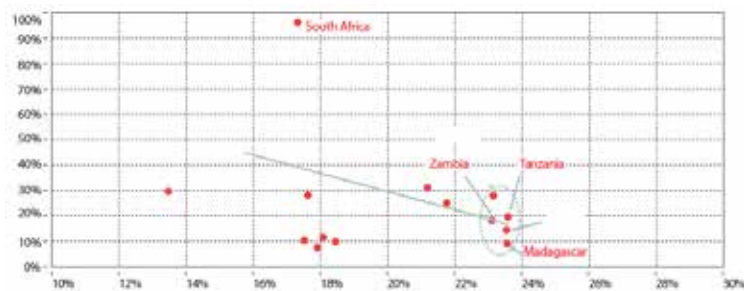
219 [https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Taxing-mobile-connectivity-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa\\_July-2017.pdf](https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Taxing-mobile-connectivity-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa_July-2017.pdf)

220 [https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Taxing-mobile-connectivity-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa\\_July-2017.pdf](https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Taxing-mobile-connectivity-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa_July-2017.pdf)

221 Source: Wireless Intelligence, Frontier analysis in GSMA: ibid

illustrated in figure 22 below:

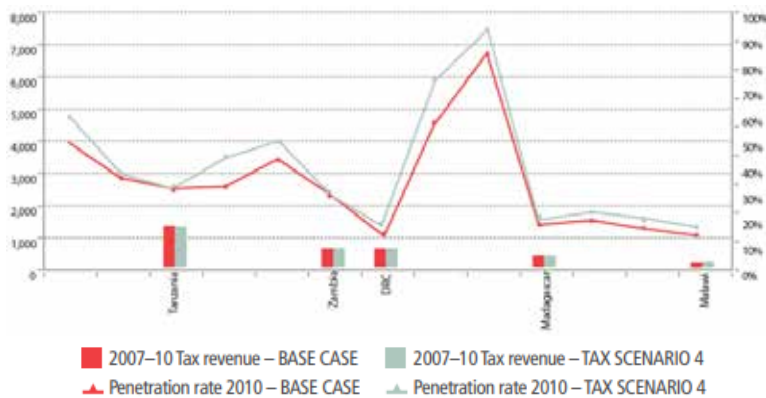
Figure 22: Removing non-VAT mobile specific taxes



Source: Own chart based on GSMA<sup>222</sup> data

Figure 23 below illustrates the impact of removing all non-VAT taxes on the tax revenue produced by the mobile industry in selected countries in the region<sup>223</sup>

Figure 23: Removing all non-VAT taxes on the tax revenue



Source: Own chart from GSMA<sup>224</sup> data

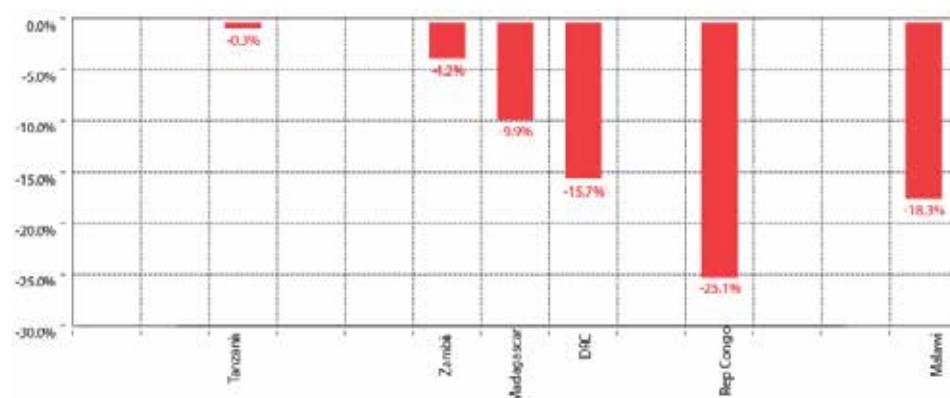
222 [https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Taxing-mobile-connectivity-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa\\_July-2017.pdf](https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Taxing-mobile-connectivity-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa_July-2017.pdf)

223 <https://www.gsma.com/publicpolicy/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/taxgrowthsubsaharanafrica.pdf>

224 <https://www.gsma.com/publicpolicy/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/taxgrowthsubsaharanafrica.pdf>

Following a short initial period where the total tax-take may be lower than if the status quo is maintained, in the medium to long term, tax levels rise exponentially above the base case. For all the countries in our sample, penetration increases, and in most cases very significantly, after the removal of non-VAT taxes. For the majority of countries analysed in our sample, after a period of only three to four years, as Figure 24 shows, the removal or reduction of all non-VAT mobile-specific taxation becomes positive.

Figure 24: Removal or reduction of all non-VAT mobile-specific taxation



Source: Own chart from GSMA<sup>225</sup> data

### Special Taxation: Case of Zambia

In August 2018, the Zambian government introduced a 30 Ngwee<sup>226</sup> (about USD 0.03c)<sup>227</sup> a day tariff on internet phone calls. Cabinet has since approved the issuance of a Statutory Instrument (SI) that will facilitate the introduction of the tariff to be charged through mobile phone operators and internet providers. The government's argument was that internet calls through platforms such as Viber, WhatsApp and Skype "threaten the telecommunications industry and jobs" in licensed telecom companies such as Zamtel, Airtel and MTN".<sup>228</sup> This also serves to show how social media has revolutionised the

<sup>225</sup> <https://www.gsma.com/publicpolicy/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/taxgrowthsubsaharanafrica.pdf>

<sup>226</sup> <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2018/08/13/zambia-slaps-a-30-ngwee-a-day-tariff-on-internet-phone-calls/>

<sup>227</sup> <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/Zambia-seeks-USD22-million-in-tax-on-internet-/2560-4713400-cmhq5lz/index.html>

<sup>228</sup> <https://cipesa.org/2018/08/zambia-introduces-daily-tax-on-internet-voice-calls/>

communications industry by providing platforms for cheap communication through calls and messages. The new tax, was expected to fetch USD 22 million annually<sup>229</sup>.

### **Special Taxation: Case of Tanzania**

The Tanzanian government signed into law the Electronic and Postal Communications (online content) Regulations 2018, which came into effect in April 2018<sup>230</sup> to impose an indirect tax through licensing and registration fees paid annually to the TCRA. The registration and licensing is inconsistent<sup>231</sup> with the right to freedom of expression as set out in the Tanzanian constitution, and in the country's international obligations. According<sup>232</sup> to TCRA Director General, 262 organisations and individuals applied for registration, but only 178 did not meet the licensing requirements. Only 65 of the applicants met all the requirements to be licensed to provide content but 45 managed to pay the fees.

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229 <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/Zambia-seeks-USD22-million-in-tax-on-internet-/2560-4713400-cm-hq5lz/index.html>

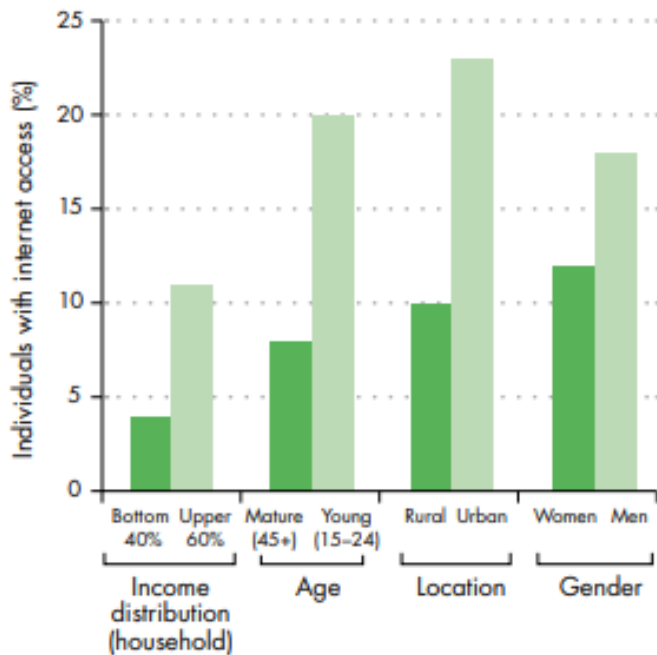
230 <https://www.article19.org/resources/tanzania-restrictive-regulations-online-content-signed-law/>

231 <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/04/12/africa/tanzania-blogging-internet-freedom-africa/index.html>

232 <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/News/TCRA-clears-45-online-service-providers/1840340-4580688-x9prcjz/index.html>

# Social media disparity or divide<sup>233</sup>

Figure 25: Internet divide



Source: world Bank<sup>234</sup>

Income, age, location and gender are some of the key factors influencing social media access and internet access in the SADC region. Upper income, Youth (15-24 years) and

233 As used here, the term “divide” refers to the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities.

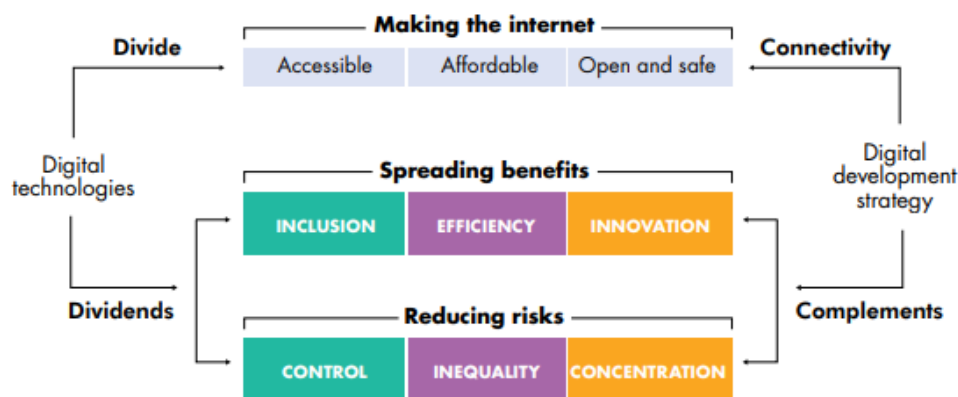
234 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2016>



Urban people have over double numbers of people in low income, mature (45+ years) and rural respectively. Men also have more access to social media than women.

Connectivity is vital, but not enough to realize the full social media development benefits. The internet, in a broad sense, has grown quickly, but it is by no means universal. To cascade the dividends of social media there is a need for policies, technical support and legislation towards equal and equitable access as shown in figure 26 below:

Figure 26: From divide to dividends



Source: world Bank<sup>235</sup>

A favorable business climate, strong human capital, and good governance are needed for digital divide to be reduced.

235 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2016>

## Recommendations

Based on the analysis above the paper puts forward the following recommendations to promote social media use in the region and subsequently promote freedom of expression and access to information:

Stakeholder engagement on reduction of costs to own handsets and access to the internet

1. Address the digital divide (gender, economical and geographical) through deliberate policies and resource allocation
2. Awareness and training on Social media benefits, use and associated risk
3. Advocacy by litigation of digital rights violations
4. Stakeholder engagement and advocacy against illegal arrest and detentions after political related publication on social media.
5. Promote freedom of speech, access to information and privacy rights.
6. Ensure the internet is kept 'ON' without internet shut downs.
7. Promote responsible citizen journalism through social media
8. Advocate for responsible use of social media within political campaigns and electoral processes.
9. Reduction in harmful social media manipulation through cyber troops within the region

## Conclusion

Social media has both positive and negative impacts within the region, hence double edged, as has been highlighted within the paper. To deal with the risk and harness the opportunities associated with social media use, the paper has shown a number of international, regional and national legal provisions to ensure digital rights.

Despite the foregoing, the existing fragmented institutional framework and legal provisions are not being fully implemented in the region; hence cases of digital rights abuses, mainly freedom of expression abuse continue to be a norm in the region. This applies primarily to the enforcement of existing legal claims in the event of a dispute, which, given the international nature of the platforms, the often-anonymous communication and occasional difficulty of allocating the responsibility of the different parties involved, has been precarious.

This paper concludes that the right to freedom of expression<sup>236</sup> as enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>237</sup> which protects the right for everyone to own opinions and to express them freely without interference, must be safeguarded and ensured on social media. There is need to consider the above ten recommendations and further studies on the issues of social media in the region mainly related to access, affordability, misinformation, gender and children.

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<sup>236</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/freedom-of-expression/>

<sup>237</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

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