

Research ICT Africa Beyond Access Study: Kenya Report Summary

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This research brought out significant information that explains the differences in Internet access between people of diverse age, education level, profession, gender and from different geographical areas, in Kenya. The research established that people were using Internet for diverse reasons with social media top in the list. There was even a misconception that Internet is about social media. Participants perceived Internet to have both positive and negative uses leading to diverse outcomes. A participant noted that Internet had become a lifestyle because if you did not access the Internet, life became very difficult. It was noted that if people's motivations for using the Internet were not community worthy, even if government and other interested stakeholders were to invest on free Internet and conducive environment for Internet use, they would continue using for the same. They noted that Internet did not create immorality, it enhanced what people did. There were concerns that if Internet was free a lot of people would be using making it congested and slow.

Most of the participants accessed the Internet through their mobile phones. Usage of computers, laptops and cyber cafes was very limited and only in semi urban and urban locations. For those who did not access Internet much it was because they had feature phones as opposed to a smartphones, which they preferred to use to access Internet. The issue for most participants who were using the Internet was not that they did not know how to do what they wanted to do on the Internet but rather that the cost of doing what they wanted to was prohibitive because of the cost of bundles and Internet enabled gadgets. Poor connectivity also contributed to not being able to fully utilise their skills online. The participants were informed of a wide range of services and websites. Some of the things they would like to do but were not able to included streaming movies and research.

Participants noted that Issues of affordability and cost influenced usage of the Internet. Some people had come up with creative ways of ensuring they were connected such as hot spotting on their friends without their knowledge, targeting buses that had free Internet, strategically visiting friends who had Wi-Fi at home, working late into the night before reward bundles periods expired and targeting promotions by different operators.

Participants perceived free Internet to be bundled with insecurity issues. They argued that with free Internet in public places, thieves would start knowing the places that there was free Wi-Fi access, and start targeting the patrons since they would know that most of the people that would go there had smartphones or Internet enabled phones.

There were concerns that under age children would access inappropriate content considering there was already an initiative that introduced laptops to primary school children. The initiative aims at ensuring that children can operate computers by the time they are finishing either class eight or form four. This was seen as a good move since laptops are not bad, but control was needed to ensure content fits with age and level of education. They noted that the challenge was for the parents to get to understand the Internet to guide their children and give them directives to access and use the Internet in a good way. Discipline to manage time and content they access to ensure moderation was considered to be crucial for the children.

The researchers noted that even when people had smartphones, they did not always carry them for security reasons. This was particularly prominent in Kibra where people walked around with cheap phones which were convenient. They planned their activities in the morning including if they were going to places with free or Poa Internet and if so, they carried the appropriate phone.

National network coverage was seen to be a challenge for both voice and data particularly in rural areas. A participant who spent 2015 in a rural town in Kitui county said that there were areas where he had to forget about his smartphone. He would use a feature phone to get Internet since it was on a lower frequency. Lack of skills to use the Internet was also a major challenge especially in the rural area.

Inappropriate content was particularly a challenge in rural areas. Participants indicated that the regulatory body should have a role to play. They argued that consent should be sought before information was pushed to people who had not requested for it. This included adverts sent to mobile subscribers. While these regulations may exist, the challenge would be imposing them.