Implications of Digital Communication Control on New Public Governance Processes in Tanzania

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Abstract

Digital governance constitutes a new era of public governance driven by the forces of digital communication and the multiplicity of actors in the governance arena. Digital communication has accorded governance stakeholders not only more access to the public sphere but also improved policy outcomes because of its participatory nature. While the transformational power of digital communication is still at its infancy stage in Tanzania, a paradox of state recentralization through obstacles to information access, limits on content and violation of user rights has been observed. This case study deploys in-depth interviews and document review to probe into the implications of these forms of control on the effectiveness of governance processes in Tanzania. It divulges a number of implications of digital communication control, including heightened government opacity, self-censorship, and digital activism. Through the Critical Political Economy of Communication approach, the paper concludes that digital communication control has weakened the effectiveness of governance processes in Tanzania.

Keywords

New Public Governance, digital communication, digital authoritarianism, Political economy of communication, Tanzania

1. Introduction

Public administration reforms since the mid-1980s have generally been aiming at, among others, devolving power from the centre to the periphery. This is because traditional hierarchical control of old public administration has been blamed for perpetuating ineffectiveness and inefficiency (Dunleavy, 2006). This paper examines this paradox of decentralization and recentralization through the lens of the decentralizing power of digital governance. It specifically explores the implication of digital communication control on the effectiveness of governance processes in Tanzania.

The shift from the Old Public Administration (OPA) to the New Public Management (NPM) and now the New Public Governance (NPG) has been driven by the decentering logic. The hierarchic and rigid public administration has been subjected to institutional fragmentation with the aim of improving efficiency and effectiveness in policy making and implementation. Decentering during the NPM paradigm has taken two forms which include agencification and marketization of government services, while for the NPG, it has entailed involvement of the social sector or networks in the policy making and implementation (Peters and Pierre, 2004). In brief public administration has evolved along three mechanisms of social coordination, i.e., hierarchy, markets and networks.

The NPG or what Bringselius and Thomasson (2017) term "the New Weberian State" has evolved since the early 2000s to address the problems of public sector fragmentation that resulted from the adoption of the NPM processes in the 1990s (Ling, 2002; Pollitt, 2003). It also aims at deepening the democratic components of the NPM governance processes such as stakeholder participation and engagement (network governance), improved government transparency and accountability, and co-production of services (Bringselius and Thomasson, 2017). The NPG emphasizes citizenship and public interest. As pointed out above, the NPG is both plural and pluralist. According to Bourgon (2011), the NPG introduces multiple actors and jurisdictions operating at the local, national and global levels. It also calls for multiple

forms of accountability, i.e., accountability to elected officials and accountability to the citizens (Bringselius and Thomasson, 2017).

Unlike the NPM processes, the NPG processes are increasingly mediated through digital communication (Dunleavy et al., 2006). In realization of the transformative potential of digital communication, some scholars have conceptualized the NPG as Digital Era Governance (DEG) (Dunleavy et al., 2006, 2011; Dunleavy and Margetts, 2015; Margetts and Dunleavy, 2013). According to this viewpoint, the NPG capitalizes on digital information processing as a key to administrative transparency and accountability. Digital communication also serves as a link for citizen participation in governance through the co-creation of services (Osborne et al., 2016; Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011). The DEG/NPG foregrounds a government that is citizen-oriented and open to scrutiny. It is a governance paradigm that blurs the boundaries between the State and civil society by putting digital technologies at the center (Osborne et al., 2013).

While putting digital technologies at the center of governance has rhetorically been the case, literature on digital authoritarianism suggests that states consistently are using digital technologies to exercise political control (Braman 2006, Bates, 2013). Both democratic and authoritarian states are increasingly deploying various techniques to control digital technologies for political economy goals rather than for fostering governance processes. Some political economists have conceptualized this trend as digital authoritarianism. Digital authoritarianism has been defined as the use of digital information technology by authoritarian regimes to surveil, repress and manipulate domestic and foreign populations" (Polyakova and Meserole, 2019:1). Other critics have focused on the concept of digital media capture to illustrate the emerging tendency of the State to constrain the media's ability to express its will and agency (Mabweazara et al, 2020).

According to this view, it is economic and power interests that is at State rather than the desire to protect the society from the hazards of digital communication (Wasko and Murdock, 2011). Digital communication control is also seen as a mechanism for the economic and political class to produce and reproduce itself by creating structures that ensure maintenance of the status quo. While digital communication has been deemed as empowering the majority to participate in governance processes, the ruling elites are using the State to control governance processes by weakening the democratizing

potential of digital communication. Thus, digital communication control is path dependent meaning that it is motivated by similar motives behind traditional media control (Allmer, 2015).

Some empirical studies using the Critical Political Economy of Communication (CPEC) perspectives have confirmed the tendency of digital communication control to address the motives of the economically and politically powerful. Two studies, one conducted by Thandi (2014) and another by Jabulani (2014) in South Africa, have concluded that the State has been used to champion digital migration to cater for economic interests rather than promoting universal access ideals. Digital migration in South Africa is argued to have catered for the interests of digital media companies rather than improving information access among the majority poor who need it to engage with their Government. Esarey and Xiao (2011) observe that digital communication in China has provided greater public access to their Government and thus improved political advocacy. The study further shows that the Government of China had responded to this kind of liberalization with legal and technological measures tailored to control political expression. The same trend has been observed in Singapore where the Government used superficial reasons on public morals and values to control legitimate public discourse on governance issues (Rodan, 1998).

Braman (2006:1) conceptualizes digital communication control as the emergence of what she calls "informational state." This is a "change of state from the bureaucratic welfare state into a form of state in which governments deliberately, explicitly, and consistently control information creation, processing, flows and use to exercise power". While Braman refers to the USA, she argues that other countries are emulating a range of informational policy tools to exercise power. According to her, informational power interacts with other forms of power. Governments are constantly "manipulating the informational bases of instrumental, structural and symbolic power" (Braman, 2006:25). In her 2011 work, Braman further argues that governments are increasingly exploiting the "overarching strategic importance" of informational power to "create the conditions under which all other decision making, public discourse and political activity take place" (Braman, 2011:2).

Some scholars have evaluated the implications of digital communication control on democratic ideals (Anceschi, 2015; Gunitsky, 2015;

Hintz and Dencik, 2016). Public awareness about digital communication control has been associated with declining critical debates and dissident voice in fear of retribution from authorities. Self-censorship among journalists, writers and those who comment on a social media posts has been identified as a side effect of digital communication control. Self-censorship entails avoiding writing or speaking about a particular subject for fear of being a surveillance target. The study conducted by the FDR Group (2013) following Edward Snowden's whistle-blowing in 2013 that the US National Security Agency (NSA) was conducting surveillance on millions of individuals' communications revealed the prevalence of self-censorship among writers in the US. It revealed that 28% of writers avoided online activity, while 12% considered doing the same. Again, 24% deliberately avoided to discuss certain topics on the phone, while 9% considered doing the same. As well, this chilling effect affected the writers' ability to express their views. The study reveals that 16% avoided writing about particular topics, while 9% considered doing the same. The study suggests that pervasive digital communication control is most likely to undermine intellectual freedom, creativity and social discourse.

According to Dencik and Cable (2017), democracy is facing a condition they term as "surveillance realism" which refers to the lack of transparency about surveillance practices and knowledge among individuals about surveillance activities. This condition has led to the normalization of surveillance and limiting possibilities of challenging the status quo to demand alternative ways to protect individual privacy in cyberspace. Surveillance, thus, is disempowering or excluding those without access to technologies that circumvent surveillance. Instead, it empowers those with expert knowledge, skills and resources to shield themselves from surveillance. The chilling effect from this development is disempowerment that limits the potential of governance stakeholders to engage in dissident activities aiming at realizing social change. This public resignation from active politics is virtually against deliberative democracy which has been fore grounded by cyber libertarians on the empowering potential of digital communication since the early 1990s.

Penney (2016) and Marthews and Tucker (2014), investigated the "chilling effect" of public awareness of government surveillance following Snowden's surveillance revelations. Penney examined the frequency of traffic to sensitive articles on Wikipedia and found that there was a statistically significant fall in the traffic for accessing such articles immediately after the

Snowden revelation in June 2013. The author concludes that surveillance negatively affects online activities, access to information and knowledge in general. Also, Mathews and Tucker investigated the effect of Snowden revelations on sensitive search terms on Google. The findings were that searching for both personally-sensitive and government-sensitive terms declined drastically after the revelations as compared to the period before the revelation.

In line with this, Bakir et al. (2015) conducted a survey in the UK to ascertain public opinion on government surveillance. Generally, public opinion favours the view that government surveillance is most likely to undermine human rights and the collected personal data is susceptible to abuse by security agencies. 55% of the respondents agree that surveillance information can be abused, while 46% agree that security agencies using Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) were motivated by welfare interests of the victims.

This suggests that there is a need to explore how the overarching strategic importance of informational power is used by the State to re-centralize government fragmentation as manifested by the NPM and NPG reforms. Research is required to explore questions such as what motives underlie the exercise of informational policy? What are the forms of informational control being experimented by the State? What is the implication of information control on the NPM and NPG processes? In other words, how state information control affects institutional fragmentation of the central bureaucracy? The paper addresses the latter question by probing into the implications of digital communication control on the effectiveness of governance processes in Tanzania.

2. Digital Communication Control: Tanzania's Experience

As Tanzania became independent in the early 1960s, it quickly reoriented itself into single-party authoritarianism by actively eliminating divergent views from politics. While civil society groups were pivotal in the struggle for independence, they were strictly suppressed after independence and justified by the new goals of creating national unity and preservation of peace and order in a fragile young state. The Arusha Declaration of 1967 which created the general framework for Tanzania's aspiration to create a socialist state was used as the grand ideology to justify state authoritarianism. This entailed shrinking the public sphere by abolishing opposition political parties, suppressing or co-opting civil society groups as well as independent media

(Rioba, 2008). Media development during the Single-Party Era (1961-1992) was informed by socialist policy. The media had to play the role of sensitizing the people about socialism policy and providing reading materials to promote general literacy and mass civic education. Specifically, the media was meant to promote national integration and development through socialism and self-reliance (Mfumbusa, 2002). As a result, the role of the media as the 'watchdog' of the Government was non-existent. Instead, the media served a propagandist role in national development through socialism (Bourgault, 1995).

The socialist era was succeeded by the post-socialist State since the year 1992 onwards. This can also be referred to as the NPM era. This was a period when Tanzania implemented liberal democratic reforms. Unlike the state-controlled media, there was mushrooming of the private media which among other things focused on questioning issues of power abuse, corruption, embezzlement and fraud (Rioba, 2008). The new media landscape improved the aspects of media ownership and media pluralism. Rioba (2008) considers this period as an era of unprecedented freedom as media firms were free to publish whatever they wanted. As a consequence, this period witnessed a surge in a number of independent media firms (Sturmer, 1998). The parallel mushrooming of Civil Society Organization (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) was witnessed during this period. Between the year 1993 and 2000 the number of NGOs has risen from 224 to 8,499, respectively (Lange et al., 2000).

Some scholars, however, have criticized the state-civil society relations in Tanzania. Katera (2016), for example, observes that the State is more inclined to compete with non-state actors rather than cooperating with them. This has limited the role of CSOs in influencing public policy in Tanzania. On the role of the media in influencing public policy, Katera demonstrates that the media is not involved. Only state-owned newspapers and radio are involved, but they only report progress without questioning implementation. Engel (2010) also observes that CSOs participation in governance in Tanzania is inclined more toward a consultative rather than a transformative role especially when donors initiate the policy issue. She suggests that for CSOs to play a meaningful role they should "influence policy towards transforming the structural conditions which perpetuate poverty" (Engel, 2010:4). In other words, CSOs in Tanzania are expected to challenge the political and economic

power structures that perpetuate poverty. Engel argues that by serving the consultative role, CSOs are 'reduced to consultation to serve certain dominant interests' (Engel, 2010:5).

Since the early 2000s digital communication has been pivotal in bolstering governance processes in the areas of government transparency and accountability, evidence-based policy advocacy, and media pluralism and diversity (Charles, 2021; Shayo et al., 2018). Some major political scandal such as Richmond, Tegeta Escrow, and Radar scandals, have led to high profile political accountability because of patriotic whistle-blowing conducted on digital media (Bebia, 2022b). Digital communication has also been used by some civil society organizations engaged in Open Government to advance evidence-based policy advocacy and monitor the quality of services provided by the Government (Bebia, 2022b; Charles, 2021; Jingu and John, 2016). In addition, the proliferation of the blogosphere and other social networks like Instagram, Twitter and YouTube has evidenced various governance stakeholders accessing multiple data sources, thus challenging the overly censored traditional media.

Despite this progress, some studies have pointed to the emerging control tendency of digital communication in Tanzania. A few studies focus on the role of the legal framework enacted to secure digital information and its impact on freedom of expression (Makulilo, 2011; Ndumbaro, 2016; Privacy International, 2015), media freedom and individual privacy (Boshe, 2013; Kalemera et al., 2015) and access to information (Kalemera et al., 2015; The Tanganyika Law Society, 2014; Ubena, 2014). Other studies focus on the effect of economic inequality on access to government information (Furuholt and Kristiansen, 2007; Eliamani, 2012); (Kassim, 2007; Makulilo, 2016; Ndossy, 2014; Simon, 2013). A few studies have attempted to link digital communication with governance processes (Babeiya and Masabo, 2017; Jingu and John, 2016; Kinemo, 2019; Shayo et al., 2018).

A study by Bebia (2022a) synthesized three emerging control patterns of digital communication in Tanzania. They include restriction on information access, restrictions on content and violation of users' rights. The first control pattern puts obstacles on information accessibility. Such obstacles range from state control of digital infrastructure, economic constraints, to legal and regulatory constraints. By law, the Government of Tanzania has the right to install and maintain digital infrastructures. In case these infrastructures are

installed and maintained by private companies, they do so on behalf of the Government. Digital infrastructure in Tanzania entails the National ICT Broadband Backbone (NICTBB), the national data center and sectoral data storage infrastructures owned by government institutions and private companies. By controlling digital infrastructure, the Government has been capable of monitoring the information transmitted on the network by censoring and filtering information that users can access. The Government is also capable of effecting total shut down of digital information if need be (ibid.).

Through this form of control, the Government of Tanzania has been able to restrict access to digital information by imposing heavy fees and taxes on digital information providers so as to limit and discipline service providers. This has been achieved through licensing bloggers and requiring them to secure annual licenses. This has reduced the number of free information providers and thus reduced information access. Digital migration has also been used to restrict information access by introducing monthly subscription fees and requirements to purchase set-top boxes. This has been an obstacle to information access among the many poor (ibid.).

The second pattern entails limits on content. This is another strategy the Government uses to reduce the quality of information reaching users. This has been done through censorship legislations and banning of live parliamentary proceedings. The Electronic and Postal Communication (Online Content) Regulations of 2018 empowers content providers to become information gatekeepers by deploying a number of mechanisms to filter digital content. Likewise, the Government has been conducting censorship to parliamentary proceedings by banning the airing of "Bunge Live" broadcasting which was run by the Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC) and other private media. The Government came up with the option of broadcasting the censored version during the late hours of the day when only a few people can watch television or listen to the radio (ibid.).

Lastly, violation of user rights has been deployed to restrict free flow of information. Violation of user rights focuses on examining how the Government violate the rights of governance stakeholders as they use digital communication to advance governance processes. Violation of user rights has been done through surveillance practices and resort to physical harassment of digital communication users. Evidence of the presence of surveillance in

Tanzania was revealed by the leaking of phone conversations among high level political officials who were gossiping about the then incumbent President John Magufuli. Surveillance as information control tool aims at creating a psychological fear among users so that they can avoid sharing critical information on digital platforms. Physical harassment on the other hand has been done through seizure of digital devices, detaining and prosecution of users in courts, fining and imprisonment and all these acts have been justified through the Cyber Crimes Act of 2015 (ibid.). All these strategies have negative implications on the effectiveness of governance processes as discussed below.

3. Theoretical Framework

Digital communication can be theoretically analyzed from the two major theoretical strands i.e. the neo-liberal and the Critical Political Economy of Communication (CPEC). The neo-liberal perspective views digital communication as a transformational force that automatically empowers the disempowered or the ruled class to access the public sphere and thus advance their goals (Al-Rodhan, 2007; Benkler, 2007, 2011). This view, however, ignores that digital media is shaped by dominant power structures that influence the media's will. This weakness is addressed by the rival theory i.e., the CPEC.

According to Mosco (2009), the CPEC can be a useful theoretical framework for studying the dynamics of the new media. One of the premises of CPEC is of path dependence. This premise suggests that, regardless of a change in technology, media practices are shaped by the predominant power structures as it has been the case for traditional media. The dominant political and economic structures eventually dictate the will of the media. This strand of scholarship focuses on commercial influence, ownership and the role of Government in shaping media behaviour. Schiffrin (2017) uses the idea of media capture to reflect the influence of the State and the market on the media. He defines media capture as "a situation in which the media have not succeeded in becoming autonomous in manifesting a will of their own, nor able to exercise their main function, notably informing the people" (Schiffrin, 2017:2). The ability of the media to exercise agency is well captured in Mosco's structuration version of the CPEC. Mosco opines that one of the ways through which the State captures media is through structuration. Based on Anthony Giddens' idea of the duality of structures, Mosco suggests that structures are

produced and reproduced through the interactions between social classes (Mosco, 2009).

       Structuration is a useful analytical framework because it captures two dimensions of the communication process. The first dimension is social class, and the second is the relationship among classes. In the first dimension, social classes can be categorized as an upper, middle and lower class to reflect power distribution in society. This can explain how those in possession of power (power elites) influence the media at the expense of the ruled class. In other words, it can serve to explain whose interests do digital communication structures serve. It can serve to show who has access to digital communication and who has not. The relational dimension, on the other hand, focuses on the nature of interaction among classes. It dwells on aspects such as whether class relationship is harmonious or conflictual. In the context of this study, this can serve to explain the extent to which digital communication control is accepted or contested by governance stakeholders.

4. Methodology

The study deployed a case study research design. Digital communication control was chosen as a case study as it is a typical defining feature of contemporary governance as compared to other aspects such as traditional media control. This study was conducted in Dar es Salaam[1] and Dodoma because the two cities host the major digital media firms, the major governance stakeholders and the key government agencies responsible for digital communication control. The study targeted informants from government institutions, civil society groups and experts who deploy digital communication to advance governance processes. The participation of various categories of informants in the study was justified by the distinct roles they play in digital communication use and control with regard to governance processes.

       Data was collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis. Saturation sampling was used to gather enough information until the ability to obtain additional new information was attained, or when further

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[1] Fieldwork was conducted between 2017 and 2018 when most of government institutions were gradually relocating to the capital city – Dodoma.

coding was no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Based on this guide, the researcher interviewed a total of 42 informants and reached a saturation point.

Documents provided information on the political and economic contexts in which digital communication control takes place in Tanzania. In addition, documents served to refine interview guide questions and to facilitate cross-checking the validity of information collected through in-depth interviews. In practice, the study critically reviewed relevant documents such as digital communication policy documents, digital information laws and regulations, parliamentary debates on freedom of information and communication, political speeches, newspapers, international agreements to promote information freedom and open Government, datasets and indices on freedom of information and government transparency and other related documents from relevant institutions.

The author adapted Elliott and Timulak's general framework for interpretive research to undertake a detailed process of data analysis that entails; data preparation; finding an overall organizing structure for the data; generation of categories or themes; abstracting the main findings in the lens of the theoretical framework, and interpretation of findings (Elliott and Timulak, 2005) This framework enabled the author to interpret the findings and make inferences on the implications of digital communication control on the effectiveness of the governance processes.

5. Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the implications of digital communication control on the effectiveness of governance processes in Tanzania. The main governance processes covered include government transparency and accountability, evidence-based policy advocacy, media pluralism and diversity and digital rights activism. Each theme is discussed in turn below.

Implications for Government Transparency and Accountability

The findings in this section converge with the literature that associate digital communication control with the 'chilling effect' phenomenon (Dencik et al. 2017; Laber et al., 2013; Penney, 2016; Penney, 2017). The chilling effect is the notion that digital communication control practices such as laws, regulations, mass and targeted surveillance and physical repression have a deterrence

effect on the potential for individuals to exercise their agency in the use of digital communication rights. The chilling effect encapsulates fear, risk and uncertainty built into digital communication control mechanisms (Penney, 2017). This also resonates with the structuration strand that stresses on the predominance of structure over agency. This strand of structuration stresses that social behaviour is shaped by the dominant norms, laws, and values of the dominant class rather than individual's agency. The data presented below highlights how the control of digital communication in Tanzania has affected the behaviour of governance stakeholders in their quest for government transparency and accountability.

Government transparency and accountability is one of the defining feature of governance processes in Tanzania. According to Monika and Grimes (2012), government transparency encompasses three main dimensions; government openness, publicity and whistleblower protection. As illustrated below, the chilling effect resulting from digital communication control has negative implications for each of these dimensions of government transparency.

Government Openness

Government openness refers to "...the information that the government releases, i.e. the extent to which governments publish information electronically or available, as well as the extent to which citizens can demand and receive information not published proactively" (Monika and Grimes, 2012:7). Government openness is a dimension of government transparency that had been enhanced by Tanzania joining the Open Government Partnership (OGP) arrangement since the year 2011. The OGP positioned the Government in a more proactive potential to release government information both electronically and proactively. The OGP had been an umbrella policy for justifying information disclosure through various government transparency efforts such as the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), the Extractives Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), the Open Budget Transparency and the African Peer Review Mechanism – (APRM). In addition, in the OGP Action Plan for 2014/2016, the Government committed to enhance reactive information disclosure by enacting the Information Access Act which was passed in 2016. Thus, Tanzania has been on the right track toward realizing the first dimension of government transparency.

Notwithstanding the achievements gained from the open government initiatives, on July 2017 Tanzania withdrew from OGP initiatives. Such a decision implied that the potential for the Government to proactively release information electronically and in a proactive manner was highly limited. Again, the Information Access Act of 2016 and its Regulations of 2017 proposed heavy penalties for wrong release of government information by government information officers which creates disincentives for them to release information. This implies that the Government was unwilling to reactively release government information through information officers. The information law and its regulations send chilling effects to government information officers making them reluctant to proactively release government information. The problem is further complicated by the cumbersome legal framework for controlling the use of digital communication.

Information Publicity

Information publicity is the second dimension of government transparency. It entails the ability of governance stakeholders to disseminate information to the public about the detected improprieties for promoting government accountability. It is one of the aspects of government transparency negatively affected by digital communication control. For instance, in 2015, the Government enacted the Statistics Act restricting distribution of official statistics without prior authorization by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (URT (2015a)[2]. Also, the Act restricted processes of independent data collection, processing and final dissemination. Evidence shows that there was increasing self-censorship among governance stakeholders as they attempted to publicize government misconducts or public service provision failures. Heightened self-censorship has also been confirmed by Powell (2017), who reports that the scope for digital publication has been constrained. For example, the 2019 report of the Human Rights Watch highlights the chilling effect on the media due to a series of digital communication control in Tanzania. The report indicates that most journalists in Tanzania were of the

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[2] The Act was amended later in 2019 to remove the restrictions. This was after an intensive donor pressure as will be revealed in details later

view that they cannot broadcast or publish issues considered critical to the Government. One of the journalists said:

> Our bosses tell us you have to be very careful nowadays and if you get any good news, even if you think it is good for people but the Government does not think it is good for them, don't publish it because anything can happen to you. We have one journalist who has been taken and up to now we don't know where he is. This warning came after Azory's disappearance.[3]

The report further shows that one activist who works on the rule of law and justice told Human Rights Watch that a staff of a radio said he would not be invited again to the TV talk show because of the remarks he made on a talk show held in 2017. The activist told the Human Rights Watch the following:

> One day I was invited to a morning radio station. I made some comments. And one of the journalists came to me and said, "Sam, you cost me. I was warned not to bring you again." She said her boss was threatened by the Government, the political party and her personally was threatened by security personnel. She said, "I wouldn't invite you on my program anymore."[4]

One Dar es Salaam-based activist told Human Rights Watch that the media is no longer covering the content of press conferences organized by NGOs that are critical to the Government. This is because they fear being shut down by the Government.

> Most press conferences we call are not put on the front page but rather in a small part of the newspaper. I guarantee that you

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[3] Human Rights Watch, (2018), "As Long as I am Quiet, I am Safe": Threats to Independent Media and Civil Society in Tanzania. Available at https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/10/28/long-i-am-quiet-i-am-safe/threats-independent-media-and-civil-society-tanzania

[4] Ibid.

cannot call the media and then criticize the Government and expect them to publish what you say[5]

In another instance, an NGO staff told the Human Rights Watch that a private television refused to air an already agreed television program that was about land rights. The program documented land rights deprivation for historically marginalized communities in Tanzania. The information contained politically sensitive information. This NGO staff suspected that the Government had asked the owner of the station not to broadcast the program. Such fears among media owners are not unfounded. For example, in January 2017 the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) fined five television stations a total of 60 million Tanzania shillings for broadcasting a press conference by the Legal and Human Rights Center (LHRC). The LHRC report alleged that government security forces abused power during the November 2017 by-elections. The TCRA justified the fine on the argument that the content was 'seditious' and thus in contravention to the Media Services Act of 2016 (Human Rights Watch, 2019b).

Fighting corruption

Whistle blowing refers to "the disclosure by organization members (former or current) of illegal, immoral or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to effect action" (Monika and Grimes, 2012:8). Whistle blowing is one of the key dimensions of government transparency as it complements proactive and reactive information disclosure. Most often, information resulting from whistle blowing directly implicates relevant institutions; therefore, any malpractice in the institution cannot be easily disclosed through a proactive and reactive dimensions of government transparency. Whistle blowing is a key element for government accountability because it puts to light incompetence that has significant negative impact to the public. While whistle blowing is critically important for fighting corruption, whistleblowers run a risk of being harmed by the perpetrators who are often powerful figures. Thus, there is a need to

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[5] Ibid.

devise a broad range of mechanisms for protecting whistleblowers against retribution.

Whistle blowing is a key pillar in the fight against corruption. In realization of the need to fight corruption, Tanzania has joined other 177 countries around the world in the United Nations Convention against Corruption and ratified it on 25th May 2005. The Convention calls for protection for whistleblowers as an important pillar in the fight against corruption. In the same vein, in the year 2015 Tanzania adopted the Whistleblower and Witness Protection Act of 2015 (URT, 2015c). The Act not only protects whistleblowers in the public sector but also extends protection to whistleblowers in the private sector. However, the Act does not give any protection to online whistleblowers or provide for an online platform for whistle blowing. The adoption of the Cyber Crimes Act of 2015 has sealed this opportunity although whistle blowing had been responsible for major corruption spotlights such as the Richmond Scandal, and the Tegeta Escrow Scandal. Hon. Lucy Owenya (MP) warned on this flaw of the Cyber Crimes Act of 2015 when presenting the opposition opinion in the Parliament when the Bill of this Act was being discussed.

> While there is a need to have a law to regulate internet communications...it is important to enact a law that promotes and protects freedom, transparency and accountability. Such law must protect the right of citizens to seek, receive and impart information through networks of communication without being intimidated by those who did not want their criminal actions to be disclosed. In the situation where our country has been succumbed with a cancer of corruption such as Tegeta Escrow, EPA, Radar, Richmond and Dowans scandals, which involved senior government officials, whistleblowers under social networks must be protected by law (The Parliament of Tanzania Hansard, 1st April, 2015, p.36).

Generally, the opposition protested against the Cyber Crimes Act for violating freedom of opinion and constraining whistleblower protection (ibid.). Early implementation of the law has led to the increased power of the police to

crack down on online whistleblowers as the *JamiiForums*[6] case indicates. The police have been sending letters to the *JamiiForums* owners to disclose the identities of their subscribers. Jamii Media, a company running *JamiiForums*, challenged the Cyber Crimes Act of 2015 in March 2016 in the High Court in protest to sections 32 and 38. The case was dismissed on the ground that the law is constitutional. This decision has left whistleblowers in a bleak situation. A series of letters sent to Jamii Media demanding subscribers' information as well as the cases against the founders for failure to disclose subscribers' identities clearly send a chilling effect to current and potential whistleblowers. One informant testified this.

> People on this platform [*JamiiForums*] have clearly been intimidated. Everyone who wants to say something serious on the platform says it in a dream. There are more dreamers on the platform than ever before. This is because they believe that you cannot be sued for dreaming. But I believe as the crackdown progresses, even dreamers will stop dreaming. This is because whistleblowers have learnt that they are vulnerable to the legal framework and extra-legal repercussions that are even most dangerous. Physical harassment against whistleblowers is a real danger. Physical harassment does not consider whether you were dreaming or not. The only assurance for the security of whistleblowers remains in the integrity of *JamiiForums* owners. But how can you trust a human being whose interests are dynamic. Obviously, the increasing pressure on the Jamii Media will win the battle to the detriment of whistleblowers (Interview, 19.09. 2018).

It is still to be seen whether *JamiiForums* and other platforms will continue to serve as whistle blowing platforms. The recent trend indicates that

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[6] JamiiForums is a whistle blowing blog based in Tanzania. It was founded in the year 2006. The site has been a useful platform for critical political discussion by different subscribers most of whom register on the site using pseudonyms to shield their identity.

whistleblowers are turning to foreign hosted whistle blowing platforms as new safe havens for whistle blowing. This is discussed in some details below.

Implications on Evidence-Based Policy Advocacy

As defined by the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (2000:11), policy advocacy entails collecting, processing and disseminating information and data. This information is then communicated to policy-makers in the most effective style through interpersonal and digital communication platforms. This complicated process is most likely to be effective in the context where there is strong freedom of expression and respect for divergent views. However, in the context where the Government restricts freedom of collecting, processing and disseminating information the feasibility of meaningful, evidence-based policy advocacy is highly constrained. Also, digital revolution has enhanced the ability to present policy evidence in the most compelling, insightful and intuitive manner. For example, data visualization is a technique of data presentation that visualizes the policy problem in an appealing manner to policy-makers. These visualizations can be shared online with the general public to shape public opinion as well. All this is possible only if the control of digital communication platforms does accommodate freedom of expression. Interview with one of the CSO staff reveals the potential of digital communication for effective policy advocacy:

> We have been using social media to advance our policy advocacy. Policy advocacy through social media is cheap and easy to reach both the policy-makers and ordinary people. You just need your phone and internet to reach the world. We can communicate both formally and informally to raise everyone's interest in policy issues. That way we have been helping in public opinion formation and enabling the people to own their policy. We have been reaching many people instantly and cheaply. At the same time learn from their real time feedback which further feeds into policy making. Cracking down social media has been a big step backward (Interview, 08.02.2017).

The legal framework for controlling digital communication in Tanzania is contrary to the ideals of evidence-based policy advocacy. For instance, the requirement for all statistics to be validated by the NBS suggests the

tendency towards the monopoly of the means of information processing as well as the manner of sharing information. The Statistics Act of 2015 is against pluralism of ideas and constrains the innovative potential of policy advocates in conveying compelling message to policy-makers. Access to information for constructing evidence is also another prerequisite that allows policy advocates to access relevant policy information. However, the Access to Information Act of 2016 fails to support this policy function. The Act provides broad exemptions that make meaningful data collection from various government institutions impossible.

The analysis conducted by Tenga and Jesse (2017) on the implications of the Cyber Crimes Act of 2015, The Statistics Act of 2015, the Access to Information Act of 2016 and Media Services Act of 2016 reveals that CSOs face a bleak potential of facing state harassment. Digital communication laws give broad discretionary powers among government officials to bring up administrative hurdles against information access. As a result, policies are most likely to be made, implemented, monitored and evaluated using solely the supply-side information. The monopoly of policy information is, however, in contrast with multi-stakeholder approach to policy making. Multi-stakeholder governance is considered by governance scholars as suitable for dealing with contemporary "wicked" policy problems (Clarke and Stewart, 1997).

Implications on Media Pluralism and Diversity

The NPG paradigm embraces media pluralism and diversity of views as the cornerstone of a learning government (Rodriguez and Zechmeister, 2018). Media pluralism presents independent accounts of what is going on in governance and improves citizen trust in Government. It is contrasted to media monopoly which is characterized by State owned media that most often present favourable coverage to Government. Media monopoly also is reflected in corporate control of the media whereby the media serves business interests rather than the public interest. Media pluralism and diversity is conducive for governance because it gives opportunity for independent views from the State and the market. In the NPG literature, media pluralism and diversity promote the public interest, as well as government transparency and accountability (Linders, 2012; Stanforth, 2006). Heightened transparency also improves public trust in Government (Rodriguez and Zechmeister, 2018).

Despite the mushrooming of digital media in Tanzania, government control has facilitated media monopoly resulting into a constrained media space. The shrinking media space was confirmed in an interview with one informant.

> All media outlets sound the same nowadays. Everyone tries to be close to the Government or a big man. This has affected my TV viewership as I no longer watch the news lately. Quality news is often shelved. I have resorted to social media because there, you get unfiltered news. Mange's Instagram[7] page satisfies my news needs. That is enough news for me (Interview, 27.09. 2017).

The shrinking space for media freedom in Tanzania implies that the ability of Tanzania to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[8] 2030 is limited. Free media allows civil society to scrutinize public policies through policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Media independence as another dimension of media freedom, allows the media to conduct self-regulation, which accords media professionals with standards to be followed so as to advance the public interest. The findings show that media independence in Tanzania has been encroached by political and economic elites and thus limits its potential to promote public interest. For instance, the Media Services Act of 2016 has encroached media independence by subjecting journalists to accreditation and de facto control of two self-regulatory bodies, namely the Journalists Accreditation Board and the Independent Media

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[7] The informant was referring to Mange Kimambi's whistleblowing Instagram page. Mange Kimambi is a Tanzanian but US based social media influencer with about 4.2 million followers on her Instagram page. Her posts have been critical to the fourth and fifth phase governments.

[8] The United Nations suggests that the success of SDGs will depend on resecting the 10 principles. Digital communication control in Tanzania constrains three of these principles that include support and protection of internationally proclaimed human rights, not to be complicit in human rights abuses and upholding the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.

Council. While the two bodies are officially independent, the Media Services Act makes them de facto under government control because board members for both bodies are appointed and accountable to the Minister of Information, Culture, Arts and Sports[9]. All journalists are supposed to be accredited by the Board and become members of the Media Council. Critics are of the view that journalist accreditation does not meet international standards of freedom of press. This implies that the potential for the media to independently play its governance role is highly constrained.

The findings in this subsection depict the relational dimension of the two classes, which is essentially that of harmony i.e., where classes are integrated and mutually accept the class relationship. As Besley and Prat (2006) quoted in Powell (2017: 86) put it, "(…for governments to exercise capture and influence political outcomes, they must have 'cozy" relations with the media". This is illustrated by the tone of interviewed media staff; whose tone indicates accepting the new order by exercising self-censorship so as not to antagonize with power elites. The tone of digital whistleblowers on *JamiiForums* who have resorted into "dreaming" as a way to avoid repercussions of their whistle blowing activities also adds to this trend.

Implications on Digital Rights Activism

The findings in this section reveal evidence that citizen-agency is shaping digital communication in Tanzania. This implies the subjective view of structuration which stresses the importance of the active role of the subjects or the dominated in challenging the power structures through the creation of alternative rules or by challenging the existing ones. This section focuses on how digital rights activism represents governance stakeholders' expression of agency.

Digital rights activism can be conceptualized in Anthony Giddens' framework of structuration. Giddens' structuration takes abreast the duality of structures. This means that while the State regulates digital communication for realizing political economy interests, the citizens also exercise agency to

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[9] Sanna Pekkonen, August 14, 2018, Tanzania press freedom plunges into unprecedented crisis, *International Press Institute,* Available at https://ipi.media/tanzania-press-freedom-plunges-into-unprecedented-crisis/

challenge state control (Giddens, 2005). Thus, the prevalence of digital communication control in Tanzania has seen the emergence of new forms of activism to counter or circumvent digital communication control measures imposed by the State. These have taken three major forms; legal action, donors' financial sanctions as well as exit and voice. Below, each of these initiatives is defined and illustrated.

Legal Action

Legal action is a kind of rights activism against digital communication control that involves challenging certain legislations or sections in a statute that contravenes the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania or an international agreement/treaty of which Tanzania is a party. This is normally undertaken by CSOs, the media or individuals. Between 2015 and 2019 several cases have been registered with domestic and international courts against the United Republic of Tanzania.

Within Tanzania's legal system, several cases have been initiated to challenge the constitutionality and legality of some digital communication control mechanisms. The constitutional case had been filed by the *JamiiMedia* founder, Mr. Maxence Melo, to challenge the constitutionality of sections 32 and 38 of the Cyber Crimes Act of 2015. The case was ruled in favour of the United Republic of Tanzania and the court declared the particular sections constitutional. Also, Bob Chacha Wangwe appealed his 2017 conviction for the publication of false information in contravention of the Cyber Crimes Act of 2015. Mr. Wangwe had been convicted to be imprisoned for 18 months or to pay a sum of 5 million Tanzania shillings for posting 'false' information on Facebook. The post was critiquing the conduct of the 2015 elections in Zanzibar. In March 2019, the High Court ruled in favour of Mr. Wangwe because the case lacked concrete evidence (Human Rights Watch, 2019a).

On the international stage, the East African Court of Justice has been instrumental in dispensing justice in this regard. One of the landmark cases that have been applied at the EAC Court of Justice is *Mseto* v. Attorney General of the United Republic of Tanzania. *Mseto* is a weekly newspaper that was banned by the Minister for Information, Culture, Arts and Sports for reporting corruption allegations in President John Magufuli's presidential campaign. The paper was banned from publishing in both print and electronic formats on August 10, 2016. On October 7, 2016 the managing editor and the publisher of *Mseto* filed an application before the EAC Court of Justice. The

editor claimed that the ban violated Articles 6 (d), 7(2) and 8(1) (c) of the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community.

The case was eventually judged in favour of *Mseto* newspaper. The EAC Court decided that the Minister's order *"derogates from the principles of democracy and adherence to the principles of good governance, the rule of law and social justice … [and] principles of accountability and transparency"* (Ibid.)

Another case that has been submitted to the EAC Court of Justice is the Media Council of Tanzania v. Attorney General of the United Republic of Tanzania that was initiated by a coalition of civil society organizations namely; the Media Council of Tanzania, the Legal and Human Rights Centre and the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition. The coalition challenged the Media Services Act of 2016 for violating Articles 6(d), 7 and 8 of the EAC Treaty (Global Freedom of Expression, 2017). On March 28, 2019 the EAC Court held that the Media Services Act of 2016 violated protocols of the EAC Treaty and called on the Government of Tanzania to amend it in line with the Treaty. The Government expressed willingness to conduct a dialogue with media stakeholders to harmonize the laws (Human Rights Watch, 2019a).

Donors' Financial Sanctions
The second initiative has been taken by the donor community. This involves donors' use of their financial power to influence government decisions on various governance issues. Donors' influence has been demonstrated by the World Bank's position on the amendment made to the Statistics Act of 2015 in September 2018. The amendment introduced two major concerns; the vague mandate of the NBS and the criminalization of fact-checking of official data.[10] The amendment gave the NBS the mandate to set standards for the collection of statistical information in general (beyond official statistics) and proposed penalties against the publication of either official or statistical information. The Act gives the NBS the broad mandate as regards the management of statistics as the following Articles indicate.

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[10] TWAWEZA, (September 27, 2018), Amendments to the Statistics Act: Our View. Available at https://www.twaweza.org/go/statistics-act-amendments-view.

> Article 17 (3) (c) sets standards for the collection, analysis and publication of statistics to ensure uniformity in quality, adequacy of coverage and reliability of statistical information.

> Article 37(4) Any person who publishes or causes to be published or communicates any official statistics or statistical information contrary to the provisions of this Act, commits an offense.

Article 17(3)(c) gave a broad mandate to the NBS to regulate independently collected statistics or supply side statistics collected by governance stakeholders. This was worrisome as the provision was likely to be abused by the NBS to censor independent statistics. Also, Article 37(4) gave a broad penal mandate to the NBS to cover independent statistical collection.

In addition to this, the amendment criminalized challenging or fact-checking of official statistics. This meant that whether official statistics was true or false, the act of intentionally fact-checking it and then sharing the results publicly constituted an offence. Article 24A (2) stated:

> A person shall not disseminate or otherwise communicate to the public any statistical information which is intended to invalidate, distort, or discredit official statistics.

Following this amendment, the World Bank decided to withhold financial resources that aimed at supporting the development of statistical systems at the NBS and support various projects aiming at achieving Tanzania's human development goals.[11] A statement released by the World Bank on October 2, 2018 read:

> The World Bank is deeply concerned about the recent amendments to Tanzania's 2015 Statistics Act, which are out of line with international standards such as the UN Fundamental

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[11] World Bank (September 12,2019), World Bank Approves Funds for Human Capital Development and Livelihood Improvements. Available at https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/09/12/five-million-tanzanians-to-benefit-from-improved-safety-nets.

Principles of Official Statistics and the African Charter on Statistics. We have shared our concerns with the Tanzanian authorities that the amendments if implemented, could have serious impacts on the generation and use of official and non-official statistics, which are a vital foundation for the country's development. It is critical for Tanzania, like any country, to utilize statistics laws to ensure that official statistics are of high quality and are trusted, and also protect openness and transparency in their use, to further public dialogue for the benefit of the citizens.

The Bank has, over the years, supported Tanzania in developing a national statistical system that effectively and efficiently delivers reliable and timely statistics. Given the recent Amendments to the 2015 Statistics Act, the Bank is in discussions with the Government on whether further support to building sustainable statistical systems is appropriate at this time.[12]

Tanzania yielded to the World Bank pressure and in June, 2019, the Parliament of Tanzania amended the Statistics Act of 2015 to remove the legal liability for anyone collecting, processing and disseminating independent statistics. Also, the amendment allowed anyone to challenge or fact-check official statistics issued by the NBS.[13] The Government yielded to the pressure from the World Bank that had withheld $500 million loan. In September 2019, the World Bank approved $450 million loan after being satisfied with the September 2018

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[12] World Bank, (October 2, 2018), World Bank Statement on the Amendment to the Tanzania's 2015 Statistics Act. Available at
https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/statement/2018/10/02/world-bank-statement-on-amendments-to-tanzanias-2015-statistics-act.

[13] Human Rights Watch, (July 3, 2019), Tanzania Drops Threat to Prison Over Publishing Independent Statistics. Available at
https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/03/tanzania-drops-threat-prison-over-publishing-independent-statistics.

amendment to the Statistics Act of 2015 and Government's commitment to facilitate the completion of education for all girls (Human Rights Watch, 2019a; Nabeta, 2019).

Exit and Voice

Exit and voice have been pivotal in advancing free speech in Tanzania. Exit and voice suggest citizen agency in response to dissatisfaction. It is based on Albert Hirschman's model that explains various human behaviour prompted by dissatisfaction with the performance of firms, organizations and states. According to this model, humans respond to dissatisfaction by exiting, voicing discontent or remaining loyal (Hirschman, 1970). Exit and voice can be used in the context of media freedom. In this view exit and voice can be simply understood as the process of exiting and voicing discontent through a digital platform outside one's country of origin. Although there are several exit and voice platforms targeting Tanzania, two have been influential nationally and internationally. They include the Mange Kimambi Instagram page and the Kigogo2014 Twitter account.

The Mange Kimambi Instagram Page

The Mange Kimambi's Instagram platform has been one of the critical social media platforms for the fifth phase government. The platform is run by Ms. Mange Kimambi, a US-based Tanzanian activist. Her platform had been generally used for gossiping and exposing scandals of different nature involving individuals and the Government. She describes herself as an activist especially in media freedom, freedom of expression and democratic governance in general. Because of her digital influence and thus commanding a huge followership mostly the youth, Mange Kimambi's Instagram platform was useful for CCM's 2015 campaigns. The platform, however, turned against the fifth phase government due to the increased crackdown on freedom of expression prompting the platform to act as a breathing vent given the shrinking civic space in Tanzania.

Initially the platform served as a whistle blowing site. Some anonymous civil servants had, allegedly, been sending government documents, internal memos, videos and other information showing government weaknesses. In addition to this, citizens from various parts of

Tanzania had been sending videos and pictures reflecting poor public service delivery.[14] In April 2018, Ms. Kimambi started mobilising Tanzanians to staging a national demonstration against the fifth phase government. The ultimate aim was to oust the incumbent president through civil protests. The demonstration was planned to take place on April 26, 2018 which simultaneously is the National Holiday for commemorating of the Union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar. The demonstrations were to be carried out in Tanzania and in all Tanzanian embassies abroad. Although the national wide demonstrations were not successful due to police intimidation, the mere act of the Government to organize its forces for deterring the demonstrations reflects the influence of exit and voice on local politics in Tanzania. The credibility of this platform, however, has been most frequently undermined by misinformation. Some ill-minded informers probably have infiltrated the platform for the purpose of undermining the platform's credibility.

Kigogo2014 Twitter Account

Another digital influencer beyond direct government control has been a controversial Twitter account running under the name of kigogo2014[15]. The kigogo2014 account is run by an anonymous social influencer. The account has been a source of controversial government information. Kigogo2014 describes him/herself as a free and fearless speaker of the truth that is being hidden by those in power. The account runs in almost the same fashion as that of Mange Kimambi, relying on government information leaked by anonymous individuals. This account was highly critical of the Government before taking a U-turn few months after President Samia Suluhu Hassan came to power in March 2021.   Like the Kimambi case, Kigogo's platform is undermined by constant misinformation.

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[14] Maria Sarungi Tsehai April 16, 2018, The Mange Kimambi Effect, available at https://medium.com/@mariasarungitsehai/the-mange-kimambi-effect-44363b23df06.

[15] The link to the current Kigogo's Twitter account is available at: https://twitter.com/kigogo2014?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

Figure 1: Kigogo's Media Empire
Source: Kigogo's Verified Twitter page: Available at
https://twitter.com/kigogo2014/status/1374989031277273091
(accessed on 26 January 2021)

The cartoon-arts above reflect the dissatisfaction of the citizens with the mainstream media and thus their exit or resort to the kigogo2014 twitter account. The art on the left indicates that the Government has suppressed the media, which has resulted to the outgrowth of the *kigogo* platform as the sole credible source of information. The second part on the right symbolizes the reality that media firms are caged and thus prompting citizens to exit and get information from the *kigogo* twitter account.

Digital activism indicates the existence of a contested relationship between the power elites and governance stakeholders. In the first instance, governance stakeholders such as CSOs, media firms and individuals have contested for a political space by resorting to legal action to either demand justice or reform the laws. These cases have challenged the legal regime constraining the operating latitude of governance stakeholders. This approach

has been successful as in most cases, the courts have ruled in favor of governance stakeholders. Another effective form of contestation has been demonstrated by donors' expression of agency through threats to withdraw financial resources. This has been the most successful power struggle because power elites have meaningfully responded to donor demands leading to the reformation of the constraining structures. Compared to other categories of governance stakeholders, donors have an extra advantage of using financial power to influence power elites. This can explain why donors are most influential as compared to the rest of actors.

Another form of contestation corresponds to what Hirschman (1970) terms as exit and voice. This has been demonstrated by governance stakeholders' shift from relying on mainstream media to informal media – The Mange Kimambi Instagram Page and The Kigogo2014 Twitter Page. The two media channels have been influential and appealing to the majority because they represent the voice of many – governance stakeholders while the mainstream media represent the voice of power elites. The predominance of informal media over mainstream media is illustrated by figure 1 above. Again, the Mange Kimambi platform, for example, turned into practical voice of dissent when it was used to mobilize citizens to engage in the national-wide demonstration with the goal of removing the Government from power. This is a clear conflictual relationship between the power elites and governance stakeholders.

Conclusion

The findings in this paper reveal the mixed nature of the relationship between structure and agency in digital communication era as illustrated by the relationship between power elites and governance stakeholders. The first instance illuminates the evidence of the increasing chilling effect on governance stakeholders' potential to engage in governance processes due to increasing digital communication control. The self-censorship tone and resignation demonstrated by governance stakeholders as regards to demanding government transparency and accountability, the death of media pluralism and the declining critical policy advocacy substantiate the raising of what Besley and Prat (2006) call a 'cozy' relationship between power elites and governance stakeholders.

In the second instance, the conflictual relationship between power elites and governance stakeholders has substantiated Anthony Gidden's idea

of the duality of structures. While creating structures to control digital communication, the Government has prompted citizen agency to challenge the dominant structures. Citizen agency is illustrated by efforts to circumvent digital communication control by resorting to informal media that represent their voice. This has been illustrated by the ascendancy of the Mange Kimambi Instagram Page and the Kigogo Twitter Account, among others. Also, the proliferation of court cases and donor sanctions demonstrate that digital communication control is a contested phenomenon in Tanzania. Despite the contestations and emerging citizen agency, digital communication control has weakened the effectiveness of governance processes in Tanzania. This suggests that although it is plausible to speak of duality of structures in the era of digital governance, the dominant political structure still dictates the will of the media. At the policy level, this generally implies a weak potential for the Government to achieve the National Development Vision, 2025 and SDGs by 2030. The emerging government control on digital communication makes the digital revolution a lost opportunity. Free flow of information would facilitate government transparency and accountability and policy responsiveness reinforced by media pluralism and diversity. In the context of strict digital communication control, the comparative advantage of the digital revolution and multi stakeholder governance is missed.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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