



DIGITAL COMMUNICATION FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITY IN URBAN TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examined the use of digital smartphone interaction for civic and public communication in the public sphere. It focuses on how policymakers perceive digital public communication among youths who constitute the majority of smartphone users in Tanzania.

Design/ Methodology/ Approach: It is designed as a case study involving a qualitative data collection method. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with policy experts in Dar es Salaam city in Tanzania.

Findings: Outcomes show that policy experts mainly focus on digital economic capacity building and less on the opportunities for developing civic and public communication as an important component of societal development.

Research Limitation: The study is designed as a case study thus limiting the generalisation of findings.

Practical implications: The study suggests policy guidelines for facilitating youths' participation in the public sphere as a strategy to guide the utilisation of smartphones to promote engagement in civic and public life specifically for youths as a trajectory towards societal development.

Social implications: The study creates awareness among youths to use smartphone interaction to participate in civic and public communication as an emerging crucial aspect of societal development in the digital era.

Originality/ Value: The study will contribute to improving citizens' knowledge of civic and public engagement via new media for achieving development.

Keywords: *Civic. digital communication. Interaction. opportunities. Social media.*

INTRODUCTION

Current statistics by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) indicate that the world's access to the internet is continuing to grow and has reached 63% in 2021 (ITU, 2021) from 43% in 2015 (ITU, 2015). Despite the increased internet access in the world, developing regions still experience lower internet access by about 57% (ITU, 2021). However, there are nuances of internet connectivity in developing regions where the African region positions at 33% (ITU, 2021) which is just above half of the internet access in developing regions. Despite lower internet penetration in Africa, Tanzania has continued to put efforts into improving access to the internet from time to time to grasp digital opportunities. The country shows a tremendous increase in internet users within ten years. Data show that by June 2010 only 4.8 million people had internet access (TCRA, 2010) compared to 30 million people by March 2021 (TCRA,

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2022) which can be regarded as an unprecedented increase. The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) reported that by March 2022 about 50% of the Tanzanian population had access to the internet mainly due to an increase in smartphone access (TCRA, 2022) which implies that the majority use smartphone devices. Also, previous reports note that the selling price of a smartphone in Tanzania has decreased from an average of \$245 to \$117 between 2012 to 2017 (State of broadband, 2020). I argue that smartphone devices are necessary for providing hotspots for internet connection among users. It should be noted that Tanzania is a youthful country which occupies about 70% of the total country's population (Awiti, 2016). The ITU report shows that 69% of youths in the world use the internet in 2019 (ITU, 2020). On the other hand, Dar es Salaam which is the largest and most highly connected city in the country occupies 10% of the total country population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2013). This statistic implies that youths occupy the most substantial proportion of internet users in Dar es Salaam through smartphone communication.

In conceptualising digital communication and the public sphere, the study employs the work of (Volkmer, 2014) “The global public sphere”. The theory offers a conceptual framework for understanding the global public sphere in terms of digital communication. It gives an understanding that currently, we have entered a new communicative sphere of social media interaction which is subjective among actors through various digital platforms. The globally networked structures are linking individuals across continents which offers a new space which deeply transforms civic communication among societies. This context relates to this study as a new framework is required in terms of civic capacity building among policy experts for improving digital civic participation which is critical for societal development.

As the global network enables diverting from the traditional notions of development in developing regions, there is a need to assess regions such as Tanzania as part of the globalised network society. Understanding this notion will enable developing countries to achieve development. On the other hand, policymakers in developing regions are not yet linked well to this new perspective of the development of a globalised network context as they still have traditional notions of development which translate development from perceptions of decision-makers rather than citizens. There is a need to assess their perceptions of development towards the view of the globalised network space such as digital civic participation.

Developing a policy guideline for facilitating youths’ participation in the public sphere, among policy experts, will help to build an effective strategy for civic and public engagement as a new emerging digital communication opportunity and an important component of societal development. Specifically, this study focuses on how policymakers perceive digital public communication, especially among youths who constitute the majority of smartphone users in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

THEORIES UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

Theoretical Ground for Understanding the Global Public Sphere

In the contemporary historical epoch of globalised communication, we require a theoretical framework for understanding the global public sphere in the context of digital communication. The public sphere increases new dialectical spaces which include gaps between the global and local offered by media. The emerging digital media increases new communication systems in

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society and public life. This theory will address the public communication space. The dialectical spaces between the global and local impact public communication thus helping to build new notions of citizenship within the public sphere. As the globalised network sphere is growing, it eliminates state-bounded communicative space, thus enabling cross-border communication. Such cross-border networked communication enables developing regions such as Africa to build an understanding of civic engagements which is necessary for societal development. This study is grounded by the theoretical work of Volkmer 2014 "The global public sphere". The theory offers an understanding of the way public communication operates in a globalised scope such as digital communication. The global and local networks are understood as no longer distinct spheres but "subjective micro-networks" (Volkmer 2014:p3). The theory challenges the notion of national states to regard a nation as a "container" for understanding the civic public sphere (Volkmer 2014:p9), which therefore requires a new approach. Furthermore, the western perspective of globalisation which regards a nation-state as an organising framework for understanding the public sphere is challenged. Therefore, a new framework which allows the notion of "reflexive interdependence" among actors is suggested (Volkmer 2014:p8). As world regions differ in the understanding of the public sphere from the notion of "subjective micro-networks", the approach for "reflexive interdependence" is suggested to enable understanding of the diversity across societies such as Tanzania as a local site situated in a global network sphere. The study will help policy experts to develop a policy guideline for facilitating youths' participation in the public sphere as a strategy to promote collective civic engagement regardless of the national borders. As digital social media interactions are increasing in Dar es Salaam, this approach is necessary to understand civic engagement in and public communication as an essential component of societal development in the globalised digital era.

The Diversity in Rural-Urban Internet Connection

Internet connectivity in Tanzania varies according to geographical locations in terms of rural and urban. Scholars have documented the rural-urban digital divide in terms of broadband access. State of broadband (2020) reports that high-speed internet for uploading or downloading is mostly accessible in urban areas while rural counterparts remain with low broadband access. The concept of low broadband access is closely related to the digital divide in Tanzania. The statistical data show that the majority 74% of Tanzanians reside in rural areas with only 20% access to electricity which implies the inability to connect with electronic devices (RIA, 2017) as the urban population does. The context of low digital connectivity in rural areas implies that the minority urban counterparts 26% (RIA, 2017) are mostly connected, a proportion which is insufficient to grasp digital opportunities for societal development. The high internet connectivity in urban areas can be linked to the preference of telecom companies to install new communication lines in highly populated regions which are closely related to the shared fixed cost of installations. I argue that the implications of the digital divide go beyond the speedy internet for downloading digital stuff, thus enabling a transformative society in terms of improving digital opportunities such as civic engagement in the public sphere as a crucial element of development. Furthermore, scholars argue that the digital divide in the country is closely linked to the income of internet users. For example, Eliamini (2012) argues that the digital divide in Tanzania is attributed to financial differences between rural and urban dwellers where rural dwellers tend to have low income than urban individuals. I argue that for



the effective utilisation of digital opportunities for societal development, there is a need to make sure that the rates for internet services are affordable for both rural and urban users. Besides, the government's incapability to finance digital connectivity is viewed as an obstacle to bridging the digital divide. Eliamini (2012) observes the low government's financial power to take care of the digital infrastructure that provides connectivity to digital users. Such incapability is negatively influencing digital inclusion in Tanzania. As viewed, digital connectivity has the potential to accelerate the country's economy (Doong & Ho, 2012); however, low access to the internet in rural areas of Tanzania implies minimal engagement in the associated benefits of digital practices such as civic and public communication. I argue that in the current digital era, civic and public communications are essential components of modern governance and societal development.

Digital Transformation in Dar Es Salaam

As the access to the internet is tremendously growing in urban regions such as Dar es Salaam, users are increasingly engaging in digital activities ranging from financial and banking services to transport and communication. For example, the financial sector has transformed in terms of mobile money pay platforms such as M-Pesa, Tigo-Pesa, Airtel-Money and Hallo-Pesa through mobile devices. Also, various bank institutions in Dar es Salaam have adopted e-banking for improving banking service delivery. For example, Mwetindwa (2013) argue that Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) are located at many places in Dar es Salaam aiming to offer financial services such as withdrawing cash, depositing money, transferring between accounts as well as checking balance beyond the bank working hours. E-banking is also available to customers who travel abroad for business or tourism activities (Mrema, 2014). The transport sector in Dar es Salaam is also transforming since individuals do not necessarily require cash when commuting in the City Business District (CBD), especially through Dar es Salaam Rapid Transport (DART). Nachilongo (2017) argue that in 2016 the government launched a smart card payment system for collecting travelling fares in Dar es Salaam CBD. Uber service which facilitates city movements took hold in Dar es Salaam and is expected to spread all over the country (Lamtey 2017). I argue that digital connectivity enables users to explore more opportunities beyond the financial benefits of digital transformations for societal development.

Furthermore, digital transformation in Dar es Salaam is also viewed in terms of the growth of social media sites where Facebook is the most popular social media site (Masele & Magova, 2017). Other global social media sites are WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube and Linked In. Dar es Salaam has a multitude of local social media sites such as Jamii-Forum, Mwanahalisi Forum, Michuzi Blog, Millard Ayo Tv, Mpekuzi blog and others. The growth of both global and local social media sites in Dar es Salaam implies an increase in individual interactions on social media platforms through smartphone communication. Eikenberry (2012) argues that digital social media interaction has expanded opportunities for citizens and provided more access to new knowledge and information. Social media platforms offer a new space for civic and public communication, especially among youths which is important for modern governance and achieving societal development, especially in the current digital era.

Digital Communication for Civic and Public Engagement

Digital communication implicates an open model of governance where citizens' participation in the public sphere is regarded as a key (Rebolledo, Luengo, & Bebic, 2018). Studies from

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other developing countries show that digital connectivity offers a space for civic engagement in the public sphere. For example, recent studies indicate that digital communication influences political engagements among youths in Kenya through opportunities offered by mobile platforms (Kamau, 2017). Local websites such as Ushahidi have been popularly used as interactive media to report elections in Kenya including the violence that happened in the general elections in 2015 (Mitullah, Mudhai, & Mwangi, 2015). Also, recently, South Africa has launched the CitizenLab platform to improve citizens' engagement in government politics including sharing ideas with their president (Pauline, 2018). Furthermore, every ministry in South Africa has its platform where citizens contribute their ideas. This digital civic communication can be viewed as a shift to the modern governance model. In Nigeria, Mustapha, Gbonegun, and Mustapha (2016:138) note that "the arrival of social media offers a new avenue to re-enact civic engagement, communitarianism and political engagement in a participatory manner" which implies increased civic participation in the country.

Despite the increased potential of digital communication for civic participation among African countries, this space is not available in Tanzania. The government is increasingly monitoring the digital space through digital media regulations. For example, The Citizen (2016) reported the banning of live parliament broadcasting services in the country since 2016. This situation implies that citizens lack the direct civic information necessary for the country's development. Also, there are increased cases of arresting bloggers from time to time using the Cybercrime Act 2015. BBC News (2016) reported the arrestment of the owner of the local social media site "Jamii Forum" for not disclosing the names of bloggers who posted on such social media sites which implies a lack of freedom of expression among citizens. The established online media regulation, EPOCA – Electronic and Postal Communication Act, introduces the licence applications to online forums, blogging, as well as online television and radio, which requires a high fee of about 900\$ a situation which may reduce the number of bloggers (The Citizen, 2018). EPOCA also require bloggers to comply with content removal when the government regards it as unauthorised (URT, 2017). However, content removal may facilitate the violation of human rights. The online regulation also criminalises online protests (Reuters Staff, 2018), a situation which poses a threat to social media users in the country. Policy analysts view the online content regulations in Tanzania as threats to freedom of expression in cyberspace (Course & Edwards, 2016). I argue that the increased government regulations of digital media hinder opportunities for civic engagement in the public sphere among young citizens who occupies the larger proportion of digital users in the country. Therefore, there is a need to explore the understanding of the policy experts regarding the new space for civic communication as an important component of societal development in the current digital era.

METHODOLOGY

The study is designed as a case study carried out in Dar es Salaam involving its three larger municipalities such as Ilala, Temeke and Kinondoni. Dar es Salaam was regarded as vital for this study since it is the largest commercial city in Tanzania with high-quality internet connectivity compared to other regions (Pfeiffer, Kleeb, Mbelwa, & Ahorlu, 2014). Also, the population of Dar es Salaam which occupies 10% of the total country population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2013) is higher compared to other regions. The high population implies a

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high number of smartphone and social media users in the country. Also, for more than 55 years Dar es Salaam served as the capital city of the country until the recent official move to Dodoma city from 2017. This experience justifies assessing the understanding of policymakers on new opportunities for digital public communications especially among youths who constitute the majority smartphone users in Dar es Salaam. Policy makers are important for this study base on their crucial role in managing social media interactions in terms of digital policymaking and understand complexities in policymaking. The study employed 32 semi-structured interviews with policy experts from different levels of the government in Dar es Salaam obtained using a snowball strategy. Content analysis was employed to analyse qualitative data whereas data were transcribed, summarised, arranged into themes, and interpreted. Codes and sub-codes were generated according to the study objective.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Policy experts' understanding of digital smartphone opportunities for youths

When policy experts were asked to describe their perception of how digital smartphone communication is an opportunity for youth to gain knowledge, they all feel that digital smartphone communication is very important since it offers the opportunity for youth to gain plenty of knowledge through the utilisation of social media platforms, Google, YouTube and other search engines. However, their perceptions are categorised into five different perceptions of the broader understanding of the kind of knowledge gained among youths through digital smartphone communication. First, policy experts understand the digital opportunity for youths in terms of economic benefits. Most of them feel that youths have more opportunities to utilise digital smartphone communication to gain knowledge on business activities as a policy expert in the Municipal council illustrate below:

“Digital smartphone communication is a very great opportunity for youth to gain knowledge. There is a gain of business knowledge, where you may google or go to YouTube and search any business which you are interested in and then learn skills for engaging in that business. There are different kind of business which are available on YouTube, and youths have the chance to select various business and select those fits into the environment they are coming from. After identifying a business, digitisation may enable you to promote your business online may be through social media and you may get so many customers who will contribute to your income” (Interview No 10, p 2).

The such illustration reveals that policy experts understand digital communication as a great opportunity for youths to gain knowledge and skills necessary for performing new business activities for individual income. Nevertheless, the perception of policy experts in terms of the opportunity to gain knowledge for economic benefits also differs. For example, some policy experts believe that digital communication is an opportunity for youth to learn online marketing strategies for generating income as a policy expert in the Ministry noted below;

“For those who use digital communication for potential purposes, they use it for boosting their economy, and they can be able to make millions of money through the knowledge they learn. For example, they may use social media to market their products or services. Currently, you can engage in a mobile business without the need to have a physical address because you can meet



your customer online and send a product indoors. If you have no idea how online marketing is done, you may learn from the marketed products shared through social media. Normally they put an image or a photo of a product or service, and contact information like the phone number, location, email, etc. for communication in case someone is interested in your product. All payment processes are completed through online banking or mobile money services. So, the knowledge in e-commerce is highly gained during digital communication” (Interview No 26, p 3).

The understanding of the digital opportunity among policy experts towards youths is mainly on business opportunities in terms of gaining knowledge for production, e-marketing and income generation which relates to the old understanding of opportunities offered by globalised digital communication for societal development in the current digital era. Such understanding focus only on the financial aspect of national development, however, digital communication offers more than the financial opportunity of societal development. As digital communication is growing fast in Dar es Salaam, there is a need for policy experts to understand the opportunities of digital communication to the non-financial aspects of societal development such as civic and public communication which is a crucial digital opportunity for development in the digital era. Similarly, Pade-khene (2018) note that digital communication through social media interactions enhances the public communication process which includes the digital mechanism for citizens' opinion formation, dialogue with immediate feedback provision, video sharing and blogging activities. Citizens' engagement in decision-making practices needs to be regarded as part of economic development. Thus, there is a need to create more understanding among the policy makers regarding the opportunity for youths to use smartphone interaction for civic and public engagement for the economic development of Dar es Salaam city.

Second, policy experts highlight that digital communication offers more opportunities for youths to gain knowledge on learning resources for academic purposes and career development through the utilisation of digital resources as noted below by a policy expert in the Ministry;

“... Youths such as students have the opportunity to learn online courses through the internet. Those who want to improve their career can be able to search online the interesting course and register to learn, in the end, they will gain skills and will also receive a certificate. Also, students have access to learning materials, for example, in our times we had to order used learning materials such as textbooks or course notes from our friends for us to learn without considering that learning topics and syllabi usually change from time to time. However, now you can search online for whatever you want on Google, YouTube, etc. to increase your skills and understanding. Digital communication has also opened chances for new learning platforms such as the HTL app which has learning notes; questions and answers for all the past national examinations, etc. Thus, students have the chance to improve learning...” (Interview No 28, p 2 & 3).

Policy experts mainly understand the opportunity for digital communication in terms of convenient engagement to online courses and easy access to learning materials which is crucial for improving the learning environment among youths. However, the gain of academic knowledge is primarily for few youths who engage in the academic arena. In the current globalised digital era, youths have digital opportunities to learn more knowledge such as civic engagement necessary for societal development. As youths are increasingly engaging in digital



interaction through smartphone communication, there is a wider space for engagement in public communication for a collaborative solution to civic issues such as policy-making practices for wider societal development. Also, de Zuniga Navajas (2015) note that as social networking is growing, it increases the demand for citizen engagement in public communication in a more collaborative way for social-economic development. Therefore, there is a need for policy experts to understand such an emerging civic opportunity and therefore promote the utilisation of smartphone communication for youth's participation in civic and public communication for the development of Dar es Salaam city.

Third, policy experts perceive that digital communication offers youths the opportunity to gain innovative knowledge for dealing with societal problems technologically. Their main understanding focus on using digital content as a key guide to problem-solving awareness as illustrated below by a policy expert in the government agency;

"...Youth have opportunities to innovate, to develop new apps, to develop content and post them online, to develop software, etc. All these are an opportunity for youths, and they emanate from digital communication. We had a youth who developed a payment system known as MAXIMALIPO which is popularly known in Tanzania, he has opened a business company and employed many other youths. Others have managed to develop a system of selling airtime vouchers by linking mobile money account systems to bank account systems. All these innovative ideas have the background from searching online information regarding how other countries have gone further steps in solving similar social, and economic problems surrounding their society. Youths have the chance to learn from others and come up with their innovation since ICT can provide solutions to many problems existing in society. Those youths who are programmers need to be informed on the issue, and they may programme to provide the solution to health, education, agriculture, etc..." (Interview No 18, p 1&2).

However, the perception of policy experts towards youths on digital communication is mainly on technologically innovative opportunities. While on the one hand policy experts perceives that youths would benefit from the utilisation of digital content in dealing with societal problems technologically, however, their perception varies. For example, other policy experts understand that digital communication offers an opportunity for youths to develop digital content through blogging as noted by a policy expert below;

"...Having access to the internet itself is an opportunity and using the internet is another opportunity and an added advantage where individuals can establish their blogs, advertise their work and get more money..." (Interview No 9, p 3).

Such a perception of globalised digital communication regarding learning innovative knowledge reflects the role of policy experts as public service deliverers in the government system which is one-sided in dealing with societal challenges. I argue that youths have an opportunity to learn knowledge on the public platform for collaborative decision-making practices in civic matters. It is essential for policy experts to understand that globalised digital communication offers a wider space which is more inclusive for youth's public engagement as a new governance model for dealing with societal development. Similarly, Maireder et al. (2017) argue that digital communication has opened a new paradigm for citizens'



communication with the government which is an immediate, fast, and interactive way of public communication. Thus, there is a need for capacity building for both policy experts and youths regarding the new paradigm for communication emerging in Dar es Salaam. Such understanding will help to develop opportunities for youth to use smartphone communication for civic engagement and public communication for city development.

Fourth, minority policy experts understand that youths have an opportunity to use digital communication such as social media to gain health knowledge as a policy expert illustrates below;

“...Youths have an opportunity to learn their health online. For example, sexual health education is highly shared through social media; it can be written stories, audio, and videos which help youth to monitor their health and prevent unnecessary sexual health problems...” (Interview No 28, p 3).

Such an understanding of policy experts on the youth's opportunity to gain knowledge from digital smartphone communication is based on convenient access to health information for promoting individual health. Such perception of smartphone communication for health knowledge opportunities relates to the understanding of opportunities for digital communication in a developing country which focus more on individual base than on broader societal development. As the world witnessed the new paradigm of communication, development opportunities need to be understood more than access to health information. There is a need to build a more comprehensive understanding among policy experts regarding the strengths of digital communication such as building public communication for societal development in a developing country such as Tanzania. For example, Bartoletti and Faccioli (2016) note that digital communication through social media is now reshaping civic engagement and political participation in terms of building collaborative knowledge between citizens and the government. Such a new space of the opportunity to use smartphone interaction among youths for civic and political participation needs to be developed more in cities of developing countries such as Dar es Salaam where digitisation is growing fast. Such understanding will enable youths in Dar es Salaam who comprises the majority of smartphone users to engage in the digital civic opportunities for the city's development.

Lastly, only a few policy experts understand the opportunity for digital communication in terms of gaining political knowledge among youths. For instance, a policy expert in the Municipal council noted that;

“...Youths also have an opportunity to gain knowledge regarding the governance system and the effectiveness of the ruling party in terms of fulfilling their promises. Political information such as political appointments made by the president and the dismissed political appointments are mostly shared through the official letter released and shared through digital smartphone communication which may enable youths to understand civic matters in the country” (Interview No 13, p 3).

However, such perception of policy experts is mainly on the convenience of political leaders in using digital communication to inform citizens regarding the political government which relates to the serving of the government interest only. The growth of smartphone interaction among youths increases the avenue for digital engagement in civic and public communication

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for societal development. For a society to achieve development specifically in the digital era, there is a need for a reflective interdependence between citizens and the government in the governance processes. Similarly, Bartoletti and Faccioli (2016) argue that the notion of citizens being involved in the public debate offers positive outcomes in the government decision-making practices which is characterised by the modern governance model in the digital era. I argue that the dynamics of individual opinions in public communication contribute to potential governance decision-making practices. Therefore, as youths characterise a majority of smartphone users in Dar es Salaam, there is a need to create more awareness among policy experts on the opportunity to use the global public sphere for civic and public communication which is vital for the modern governance in Dar es Salaam city.

Policy expert's perception of the youth's misuse of digital smartphone interactions

Apart from the positive gain of knowledge from digital communication, on the other hand, policy experts perceive that youths use digital communication less potentially. However, there is a variation of perception regarding the gain of knowledge which is less favourable for societal development. For example, a policy expert in the Municipal council note that;

"... most youths are misusing the internet and digital communication, they only use it for refreshment, chatting, viewing other people's posts, watching movies and music, etc. they are not aware that such practices mean the wastage of time, they could use the same time to learn meaningful stuff"
(Interview No 9, p 3).

The understanding of policy experts on youths' misuse of digital smartphone communication is mainly based on smartphone communication for personal entertainment such as chatting, watching movies and viewing posts which reflects the personal convenience among users. Perceptions of policy experts regarding the less potential use of digital communication among youths translate to more freedom in using digital communication for personal and social interactions than engaging in civic and public communication in cyberspace. However, this context helps to reflect the role of the government in promoting the opportunity for youth's engagement in the potential use of smartphones such as civic and public communication. Similarly, Ohlin et al. (2010) report that young people are more connected to society than to the government unless there are changes in the way democracy works. Policy experts need to understand that implications for digital communication towards societal development depend on the extent to which the digital space is free for youths to grasp digital opportunities. Also, Bartoletti and Faccioli (2016) argue that legislative measures which promote open government and citizens' inclusiveness in influencing the governance process are the favourable governance model for development in the current digital era. Therefore, the opportunity for urban youths to use smartphone interaction to participate in civic and public communication actively needs to be developed more through the establishment of favourable legislative measures in Dar es Salaam.

On the other hand, policy experts perceive that youths fail to gain potential knowledge from the use of digital smartphone communication due to information illiteracy as a policy expert from the government agency illustrate below;

"In my view, I think few youths have benefited from globalisation, and most youths have not yet benefited from such an opportunity just by looking at the



number of youths. The biggest challenge is information illiteracy where despite having all the information at their fingertips, youths fail to understand where certain specific information may be accessed. There should be a certain level of understanding of the 'where' of information so that you may put efforts to search for it, but if you are unaware you may not be able to search for it. In this way, most youths use the advantage of being globalised for social purposes than searching for other specific information which might be more helpful or that might open chances for socio-economic opportunities than just social interaction like chatting with friends and relatives in social media networks..." (Interview No 17, p 1&2).

Their central understanding of youth's failure to grasp digital smartphone opportunities is directed towards digital illiteracy; however, it reflects that youths are less prepared by the government to grasp digital opportunities. This understanding calls for the need to create more awareness among policy experts regarding the new opportunity for youth's civic engagements. Similarly, scholars in digital media emphasise the need to develop digital literacy for digital civic engagements. For example, Pade-khene (2018) note that for a nation to reap fruits of the digitisation, it is essential to build capacity among citizens to develop their ability to become active citizens in the digital era. Such context implies the need for capacity building among policy experts in Dar es Salaam who will guide the development of digital literacy for youth's active engagement in civic and public communication.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study concludes that policy experts in Dar es Salaam understand digital smartphone opportunities among youths mainly in terms of the gain of economic benefits such as business activities and online marketing; gain of academic opportunities such as learning resources; gain of health knowledge, and gain of the technological innovation opportunities for dealing with societal challenges. However, I argue that such perspectives of digital opportunities relate to the traditional notion of understanding digital opportunities for development which conflicts with the perception of development in the 4th industrial revolution. It further concludes that digital opportunities in terms of civic and public communication which is currently emerging as a crucial aspect of societal development in the digital era are less understood among policy experts in Dar es Salaam. The study suggests – as a first step – policy guidelines for facilitating citizens' participation in the public sphere in Dar es Salaam city as a strategy to promote engagements in civic and public life engagement via smartphone specifically for young citizens as a trajectory towards societal development.

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