Original Article

Social Media Activism in Tanzania: Exploring @MariaSTsehai and @fatma_karume Use of X to Influence Socio-political Change

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Tanzanian activists utilize the affordances of X (formerly Twitter) to drive socio-political change in the country. Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for activism, fostering dialogue, enhancing visibility, facilitating communication, and mobilizing support. While significant research has explored the role of social media in activism globally, there is limited scholarly focus on its impact and mechanisms within the Tanzanian socio-political context. To address this gap, we analyzed 6,384 tweets from two Tanzanian activists' X accounts using Twitonomy for descriptive analysis and Qualitative Data Analysis Miner Lite for thematic analysis. The conceptual frameworks of online listening and digital citizenship informed our analysis and interpretation of the findings. The results reveal that Tanzanian activists leveraged X to advocate for democracy and human rights, discuss national political and economic issues, and disseminate information. Their online activism has been instrumental in achieving key objectives, including overturning the ban on public political meetings, securing the release of political prisoners, and advancing the agenda for a new constitution. The conversational nature of their discourse highlights the practice of mutual listening among activists. We conclude that while social media offers significant potential to foster socio-political change, its effectiveness depends on its responsible and strategic use. To strengthen this impact, we recommend integrating digital citizenship into Tanzania's civic education policies and providing targeted training on content creation for activism and political engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The new age of smartphones, accompanied by increasing internet penetration and social media access, is amplifying the methods as well as the intensity of political activism (Kiranda et al., 2016). Social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and YouTube have been used to successfully promote political communication and campaigning. Successful citizen-led campaigning on issues of human rights and accountability is also increasingly conducted on social media; thus, uses of social media among activists are almost as diverse as their venues. For example, Social media is a tool for mobilizing individuals for collective action as well as a forum for exposing problems like police brutality. For example, social media can be a tool for mobilizing individuals for collective action as well as a forum for exposing problems like police brutality (Gerbaudo, 2012).

According to Murthy (2018), recent social movements such as Black Lives Matter transitioned from tweet debates to action on the streets which profoundly shaped discussions about race. Activist organizations are increasingly seeing the value of social media for recruitment, public engagement, and campaign organization. He adds that social media can effectively enable the sharing of data across traditional barriers such as geography. By doing so, social media helps to develop and maintain a sense of community in large activist organizations and can be a motivator for participating in these platforms (Croeser & Highfield, 2014; Murthy, 2018).

Kalyango Jr and Adu-kumi (2013) reported that social media networks were increasingly becoming a critical component of civic engagement and an ideal mode of communication, as they generate virtual discourse among friends, acquaintances, groups with similar aspirations, and with whoever shares one's common interests. They add that social media networks have helped African netizens to keep in touch with people from around the world and connect with distant others including leaders and policymakers who are otherwise not easily reachable by any other means. Jha and Kodila-Tedika (2019) assert that social activists have utilized the internet and social media to bypass authorities to reach the masses in their bid to promote democracies in several countries. Even though the governments in many countries have responded to that by targeting these social activists using vague laws and restricting the contents that can be accessed and shared on the net, social media has made it possible to get such news out in the world forcing governments in many countries to retreat because of international censure and pressure. Consequently, the governments issue unrestricted access to independent news sources and the freedom to share such contents on social media without the fear of retaliation from the governments have become some of the important concerns in many parts of the world.

O'Brien (2021) observes that, although the flourishing of social media and digital technologies over the past decade and a half has had considerable impacts on all aspects of society, including in the area of activism by enhancing opportunities for

communicating and sharing information, there has also been resistance, as the new technologies have been used to police certain voices, reinforcing existing hierarchies and power structures. He adds that the state has played a central role through actions to restrict access to social media platforms in some cases or target those seen as challenging. However, social movement organizations and civil society more broadly have taken advantage of these new opportunities in pressing their claims. To do that, they have had to navigate increasingly complex and messy realities while adapting long-standing tactics and repertoires to accommodate the new opportunities provided by digital tools (O'Brien, 2021). Murthy (2018) points out that although social media platforms can ultimately foster a powerful "sense of virtual community" (Majchrzak et al., 2013; Kalyango Jr & Adu-kumi, 2013), a practical reality is that social media can be difficult to implement in terms of fostering a clear organizational structure because: they are subject to governmental and other surveillance and they often require vast amounts of resources to keep social media networks alive.

Tanzania is classified as "Partly Free" in Freedom in the World 2022, the organization's annual assessment of political rights and civil freedoms around the globe. One of the factors mentioned was the shutdown of media outlets and social media, according to Freedom House (2022). Following the general election in 2015, Tanzania experienced a severe blow to democracy and freedom of expression, which resulted in a ban on all public political gatherings beginning in 2016. Social media users were subject to intensive government inspection in addition to the more extreme state takeover of the mainstream media; the late President even declared his dislike for social media. Many internet TVs were shut down as a result, and those who wished to go on had to register and pay an annual subscription fee. Although President Samia Suluhu Hassan lifted the ban on online TVs in 2021, her administration continued to target and restrict media outlets, with the suspension of *Uhuru* and *Raia Mwema* newspapers (Freedom House, 2022), and the ban on public meetings continued until 2023. The aforementioned atmosphere fuelled the increase of social media activism in the country. While significant research has explored the role of social media in activism globally, there is limited scholarly focus on its impact and mechanisms within the Tanzanian socio-political context. Therefore, this article aimed to examine how Tanzanian activists utilize the affordances of X (formerly Twitter) to drive socio-political change in the country. Specifically, the article analysed how the selected handles use X? What topics do they cover on their X use? And what influence have they exerted on the socio-political conditions in the country?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A total of 6,284 tweets were collected from @fatma_karume and @MariaSTsehai using Twitonomy, an online tool for X research. These two accounts were selected because they had the largest number of followers and have consistently been advocating for socio-political change in Tanzania. Furthermore, their data complement each other. The analytics of the two X handles and the most recent tweets from the chosen handles were the two types of data that Twitonomy was ordered to acquire during our data collection. To gather the two data sets, up to 3,200 of the most recent tweets-which covered the time span from March 10, 2022, to January 5, 2023-were retrieved per request via the X Public Search API. The information was gathered when Tanzania forbade open political gatherings and soon after the prohibition was removed. The descriptive analysis was done using Twitonomy and inductive thematic analysis was done using QDA Miner Lite. While Twitonomy was chosen for its proven capability for Twitter research, QDA Miner Lite was suitable for the qualitative analysis.

The inductive thematic analysis was a multi-step process. We started by being acquainted with the material by reading it several times over in order to get a general grasp of it and to identify any first

impressions or concepts. The second step in the coding process is to find and designate significant data units. Third, after a significant amount of preliminary coding was finished, we started looking for links and patterns between various codes. Fourth, we reviewed and refined themes as they emerged. Fifth, we choose and gather evidence to support each theme during the coding process, such as pertinent quotations or examples. Finally, after the thematic coding was finished, we examined the importance and meaning of each theme by interpreting and analyzing the data.

In this study we used publicly available data from X. To uphold ethical research conduct, all the information collected was used solely for research purposes. Furthermore, sensitive content was paraphrased and the user was anonymized to ensure no harm.

RESULTS

Analytics of @fatma_karume and @MariaSTsehai X usage

@fatma_karume

@fatma_karume joined X on January 18, 2018, advocating for human rights, judicial independence and the rule of law. On January 05, 2023, Twitonomy was used to analyse the handle and revealed that @fatma_karume had 1,017,583 followers, she follows 535 users and has 66,653 tweets to her credit. It was also revealed that from March 4, 2022, to January 5, 2023, @fatma_karume participated in 3,186 tweets, an average of 10.34 tweets per day which makes it one of the busy accounts. It is also clear that 49% of the tweets examined were retweeted indicating the account was engaging with other users. Furthermore, it was found that @fatma_karume was mentioned an average of 0.11 times in each tweet and that 15% of the tweets analysed received replies, which means the user was interactive with others. Figure 1 below shows @fatma_karume's bio and tweets analytics.
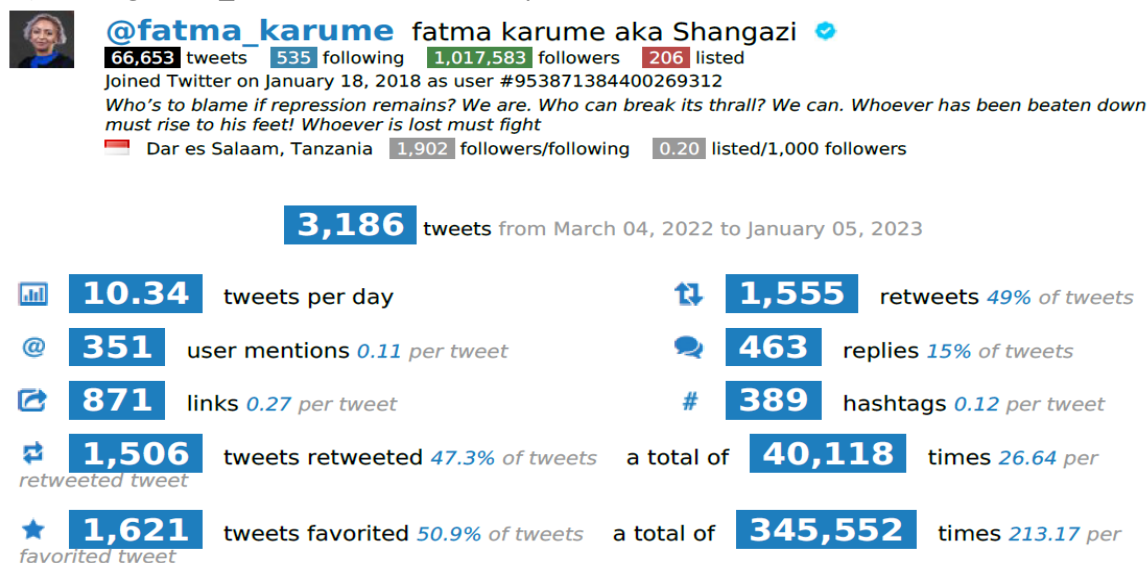
Figure 1. @fatma_karume's Bio and Analytics

Figure 1 further indicates that @fatma_karume used 871 links which suggests that she is a source of information to other users. She has used 389 hashtags which increases the chances of her tweets being easily found in a search. It also shows that 47.3% of @fatma_karume's tweets were retweeted by other users which implies that other X users view @fatma_karume's content as a reliable information source. It was further revealed 50.9% of @fatma_karume's tweets were liked which confirms that X users value @fatma_karume as a reliable information source.

Figure 2 below reveals that @fatma_karume most frequently (168 times) retweeted @MariaStsehai, followed by @ThabitSenior (103 times), both are fellow activists.

Figure 2. Users most Retweeted by @fatma_karume
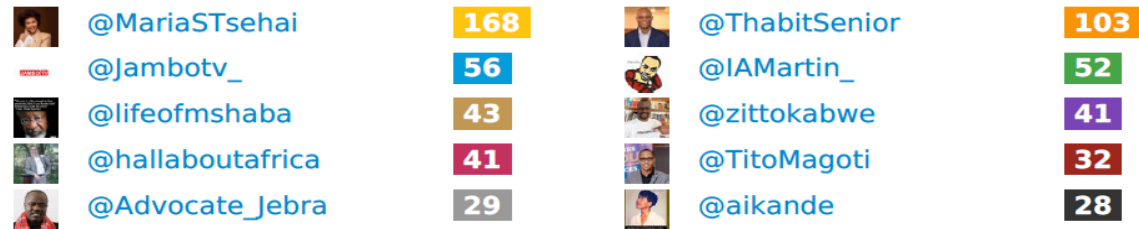
A general comment on Figure 2 above is that all handles belong to social media activists except @jambotv_ which is an online TV and @zittokabwe who in addition to activism, is also a renowned politician. This shows the extent to which Tanzanian activists cooperate with each other in their activism.

Furthermore, as Figure 3 below indicates, @fatma_karume primarily addressed herself (218 replies) and @ThabitSenior (20 replies) in her comments.

Figure 3. Users @fatma_karume most Replied to

Figure 4.19 above shows that @fatma_karume mostly interacts with other activists and political leaders such as @zittokabwe and President @SuluhuSamia. This is also clear in Figure 4 below which presents the users @fatma_karume mentions the most.
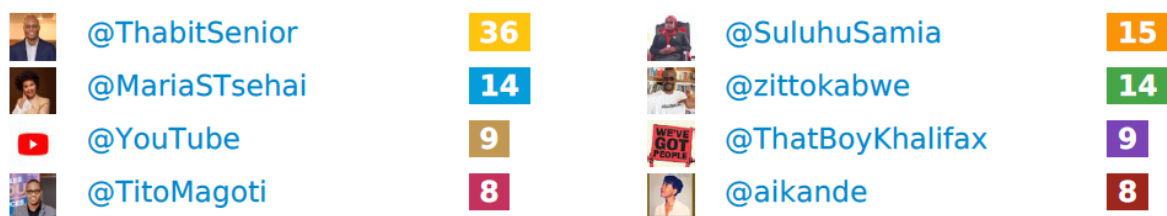
Figure 4. Users most Mentioned by @fatma_karume

Figure 4 above shows that @fatma_karume mentioned @ThabitSenior (38 times), @SuluhuSamia (15 times), @MariaStsehai (14 times) and @zittokabwe (14 times). She has also mentioned @YouTube 9 times meaning she also uses YouTube in her activism. This implies that her

activism reaches a wider audience and is therefore likely to have more impact.

In Figure 5 below, the analytics further reveal hashtags most used by @fatma_karume during the analysed period. The six most used are #Tanzania (135 times), #KatibaMpya (52 times), #Zanzibar (51 times), #Tanganyika (18 times), #TumeHuru (17 times) and #RuleOfLaw (10 times).

Figure 5. Hashtags most Used by @fatma_karume

Judging from the hashtags she mostly uses, @fatma_karume is advocating for the rule of law in Tanzania. She furthermore supports the movement for a new constitution that recognizes three governments: Tanganyika, Zanzibar and Tanzania. She also participates in the discussion to get an independent electoral commission using the #TumeHuru hashtag.

@MariaSTsehai

@MariaSTsehai works to promote human rights, freedom of speech, and the rule of law. @MariaSTsehai started X on March 14, 2009. The bio for @MariaSTsehai and tweet analytics are displayed in Figure 6 below.

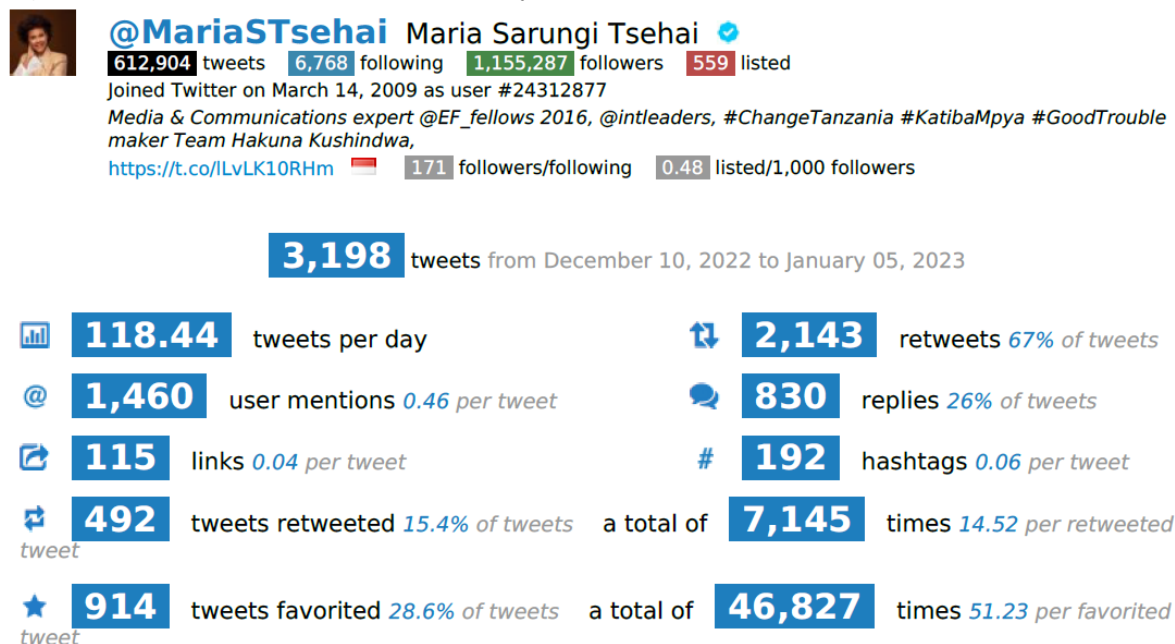**Figure 6. @MariaSTsehai's Bio and Analytics**

Figure 6 above shows that @MariaSTsehai has 612,904 tweets to her name, 6,768 accounts that she follows, and 1,155,287 followers. It also shows that @MariaSTsehai participated in 3,198 tweets between December 10, 2022, and January 5, 2023, an average of 118.44 tweets per day making her account very busy. The fact that 67% of the tweets analysed were retweeted makes it obvious that she interacts with other users to a great extent. Additionally, @MariaSTsehai was mentioned 0.46 times on average for each tweet and 26% of the tweets examined received replies. This proves that the user is very interactive.

The inclusion of 115 links seen in Figure 6 indicates that @MariaSTsehai is a source of information for other X users. She has used 192 hashtags, which increases the likelihood that a search will turn up her tweets. Additionally, it reveals that other users retweeted 15.4% of the tweets from @MariaSTsehai indicating that other X users consider the content of @MariSTsehai to be a trustworthy information source. Furthermore, 28.6% of @MariaSTsehai's tweets were liked which demonstrates that X users regard @MariaSTsehai as a trustworthy news source.

Figure 7 below reveals that @MariaSTsehai most frequently (474 times) retweeted @MwanzoTv, an online TV she owns, followed by @Big0047 (44 times) and @lifeofmshaba (36 times).

Figure 7. Users most Retweeted by @MariaSTsehai

From Figure 7 above, it is clear that @MariaSTsehai mostly shares news and information from @MwanzoTv, fellow activists and opposition politicians such as @godbless_lema. It was further revealed that @MariaSTsehai mostly interacts with herself which happens when a user replies to comments on her tweets. Figure 8 below presents the users @MariaSTsehai mentions the most.

Figure 8. Users most Mentioned by @MariaSTsehai

@MariaSTsehai has mentioned President @SuluhuSamia the most. This is probably due to the changes she is advocating for in the Tanzanian government which is led by President Samia Suluhu. @MariaSTsehai also mentions other activists and the United Nations (@UmojaWaMataifa) to influence her voice to be

heard as she campaigns for human rights nationally and internationally.

Figure 9 below shows ten hashtags @MariaSTsehai used the most during the time period under study.

#TutaelewanaTu (40 times), #KatibaMpya (23 times), #FreeWiwa (21 times), #MariaSpaces (19 times), #Tanzania (17 times), and #Zimbabwe (8 times) are the six most often used hashtags.

Figure 9. Hashtags most Used by @MariaSTsehai

Hashtags most used

#tutaelewanatu 40	#katibampya 23
#freewiwa 21	#mariaspaces 19
#tanzania 17	#zimbabwe 8
#wenyenchiwananchi 5	#changetanzania 5
#zanzibar 4	#changeafrica 4

Analysis of Figure 9 above reveals that @MariaStsehai engages in national and international activism. The hashtags #KatibaMpya and #WenyeNchiWananchi are used by Tanzanians in a movement to demand a new constitution in which the citizens will have power over the government. Through #MariaSpaces, she facilitates live audio discussions using X Spaces. Any X user can join, listen to, and participate in discussions on politics, human rights, or other burning issues of the day or week. This is also one of her efforts to promote freedom of expression in Tanzania. Furthermore, the hashtags #ChangeAfrica, #FreeWiwa and #Zimbabwe identify @MariaSTsehai as an international activist campaigning for change and improvement of human rights beyond Tanzania.

The analytics of the two accounts and the extent of usage of the analysed accounts. It is evident that the accounts were busy judging by the number of tweets they were involved with per day. The metrics also speak of the interactive nature of the accounts. The mentions, replies, retweets and hashtags used imply that the accounts provide a platform for social media users to engage in activism. The analytics also provide a means of analysing online engagements of accounts or content shared.

Thematic Analysis Results

6,284 tweets collected from @fatma_karume and @MariaSTsehai were analysed thematically. The themes that came out of the analysis are presented below, along with pertinent data extracts.

X as a Channel for News and Information Dissemination

Tanzanian activists use X as a platform for sharing news and information from local or international news media, mainstream or online. They also share news and information from other X accounts or other social media platforms such as YouTube. In the extract below, @fatma_karume shares information about an education program:

> *RT @Martinez_Elin: Important news: Earlier this month, #Tanzania and the #WorldBank agreed to restructure #SEQUIP: the government has pledged to adopt continuation guidelines, & prohibit involuntary pregnancy testing in schools. Read @hrw @AccountCounsel analysis… @fatma_karume*

The extract above informs the public of the agreement between the Tanzanian government and the World Bank to restructure the Secondary Education Quality Improvement Program (SEQUIP) Program. Important information from

the tweet is the government committing to adopt the program guidelines and prohibiting involuntary pregnancy testing that was campaigned against by activists.

Analysis of the activists' X data reveals that activists use other social media platforms in addition to X to disseminate information to a wider audience. Other platforms identified to be used are Telegram, Forums such as Jamii Forums, YouTube, Clubhouse and Facebook. The tweet below illustrates:

> *RT @MariaSTsehai: You can now download the Research Report on the Powers of the President conducted by the Constitutional Reform Commission chaired by Justice Warioba. Now, subscribe to the #WenyeNchiWananchi Telegram channel so you don't miss out on information, various reports. @fatma_karume*

In the tweet above, @fatma_karume shares @MariaSTsehai's post that informs followers of the availability of a report on the #WenyeNchiWananchi Telegram channel. Telegram is preferred because it allows the sharing of large document and audio files, and subscriptions of a large number of members compared to other platforms such as WhatsApp. When sharing large video files, activists upload them on their YouTube channels and share the link on X. This also happens when they engage in live online discussions where they live stream on multiple platforms like X spaces, YouTube, Facebook and Clubhouse. In such cases, X is used to mobilise a wider audience outside the platform.

X as a Platform for Economic and Political Discussion

Tanzanian activists have constantly engaged their followers to discuss economic and political issues happening in the country. They have used their platforms to express their views on the country's leadership. One such instance is shown in @fatma_karume's data. Following being insulted

by her followers for defending a political leader's son who was beaten by the police on allegations that he had insulted the police officers, @fatma_karume believes that there is division and hatred between the leaders and the people. Thus she tweets:

> *It is time to reflect on the LEADERSHIP of #Tanzania. This DIVIDE and HATE between the Citizens and the LEADERS has been caused by AUTHORITY, EVIL, CRUELTY, and the belief that the Leaders are above the Law. Careful my friends. It's a breeding ground for social unrest. @fatma_karume*

In the above tweet, @fatma_karume shows her concern about Tanzania's leadership. According to her, there is divide and hate between the citizens and leaders that is caused by the lack of rule of law where leaders are authoritative, cruel, and evil and they believe they are above the law. She warns that this situation can lead to social unrest.

Activists have been engaging in discussions on the economic situation in the country as influenced not only by global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine crisis but also by the country's economic policies and actions taken by the government to remedy the economic hardship facing Tanzanians. One example is the Russian invasion of Ukraine which raised concerns about the fate of oil prices and activists raised their voices to alert the government to take proactive measures, as the extract below indicates:

> *RT @mwigulunchemba1 wake up and smell the coffee. Oil prices will rise because Russia is a major oil supplier in the world. Now ask yourself just one question: will your CHARGES and TAXES on fuel be tolerated and for how long? You need to start building your economic scenarios!*

In the above tweet which tags (mentions) the minister of finance, @mwigulunchemba1, activists warn the minister that the charges and taxes planned to be effected on oil will be unbearable with the rise

in the price of oil caused by the Ukraine crisis. They call on the minister to prepare economic scenarios that will enable to contain the situation.

The thematic analysis reveals that activists have also used their X platforms to express their disappointments over government failings, as @MariaSTsehai's tweet below indicates:

> *Whenever we get angry against the Government's FAILINGS, the answer is, the Government's job is not to provide water services, emergency services, electricity, and hospitals, to promote the economy so that people can get jobs, to provide education, to build structures. Question: Is your job just to lock us up? I don't understand you at all.*

In the above extract, @MariaSTsehai lists the government's responsibilities which include: stimulating the economy so that people may acquire jobs, providing education, and creating structures. It is also the government's responsibility to provide water services, emergency services, energy, and hospitals. She is disappointed that the government fails to fulfil such responsibilities but it is quick to imprison activists and government critics.

Furthermore, activists have also used their X platforms to commend good government's actions. One example is when @fatma_karume commends a good government policy of not closing borders to prevent food products from being exported, as the extract below shows:

> *Excellent policy. Let the farmers earn their living. If there is a shortage of food in TZ, the Government should buy it from farmers at a good price and not close the borders so that they can keep their produce without the market so that the price of BREADBASKET will decrease and show that inflation is low. You break the motivation to cultivate.* @fatma_karume

In the extract above, @fatma_karume commends the policy and opines that farmers should be allowed to make a living as they please. She adds further that if there is food scarcity in Tanzania, the government should purchase it from farmers at a fair price rather than closing the borders and preventing them from selling their produce, which would cause the price to drop and demonstrate that inflation is low. She believes that closing the borders demotivates farmers.

X as a Tool for Activism

Tanzanian activists use X as a tool to advocate for human rights, gender equality, change in the justice system, democracy, good governance and the rule of law. They have fought against power disparities, exposed and opposed abuses, and mobilized for human rights using X. One of the most contested human rights abuses by Tanzanian activists is land grabbing and forced evictions, as seen in the extract below of a tweet by @MariaStsehai:

> *On December 21, 2022, Villagers of Nyamongo woke up to bulldozers today in #Tanzania as govt is demolishing their houses without compensation in order to give the land to North Mara gold mine owned by @BarrickGold. Villagers have refused the compensation offered initially by the govt as being too low!*

In the excerpt above, @MariaSTsehai reports a case of the Nyamongo people's houses being demolished by the government so that the land can be offered to a gold mine company. According to her, the people were not compensated and they had refused earlier compensation because it was too low. In this case, @MariaSTsehai acts as the voice for the oppressed.

Apart from land grabbing and forced evictions, police brutality is one of Tanzanian activists' most hotly debated human rights violations. Activists have constantly been raising their voices against police actions on civilians, activists and politicians who are arrested and detained, sometimes for a long time without trial. One such instance is presented in the retweet by @fatma_karume below:

RT @Happine61746941: @IAMartin_ @MariaSTsehai @godbless_lema while we are addressing police brutality and are reminded no one is safe until there are changes made in addressing police brutality, let's not forget Isaac is still in the hands of the police for sharing a meme #FreeIsaac @fatma_karume

In the extract above, activists are reminded that as continue discussing police violence and being reminded that nobody is safe until measures are made to address police brutality, they should not forget that Isaac is still being held by the police for sharing a meme. It is interesting to note that the above tweet tags other influential activists for wider coverage. There is also the use of the hashtag #FreeIsaac to coordinate the campaign for Isaac's release.

Tanzanian activists use X to advocate for gender equality, girl child rights and against gender-based violence by sharing knowledge and their views to improve gender equality, condemning gender-based violence actions, and advocating for legal and policy change to resolve the gender inequality gap that women appear to be disadvantaged in education and economic opportunities. For example, @fatma_karume retweeted key takeaways of a gender conference posted by @WBTanzania, as the tweet below indicates:

RT @WBTanzania: #RECAP "We've embarked on 4 priority areas for gender equality: Women economic empowerment, Elimination of #GBV, Increasing the number of women in leadership and decision-making positions, and Mainstreaming gender issues in sectoral ministries" — Amon Mpanju, Deputy PS

In the extract above, World Bank Tanzania gives a summary of four priority areas of gender equality that the Tanzanian government has embarked on as presented by the deputy permanent secretary of the ministry responsible for gender. In that case, X is used to disseminate information generated in a conference.

To advocate for democracy, good governance and the rule of law, Tanzanian activists use their accounts to raise their voices against government actions that threaten democracy, campaigning for the release of political prisoners. One such instance is where activists are regarded as a threat by the government, as the tweet below indicates:

RT @TitoMagoti: Pres SSH has yet again made it clear that she does not like Activists. A month ago, in a Court session, a HC Judge made similar miserly sentiments to Adv @Pmadeleka. We're drifting!

In the above extract, @TitoMagoti shares government leaders admitting that they do not like activists. According to him, such comments by leaders in a democratic country means a drifting from democracy. In addition, Tanzanian activists view the current constitutional system as an obstacle to the development of democracy in the country. This is evident from the tweet by @fatma_karume below:

If you read the purpose statement of TCD, you see that those who created it had good intentions and wanted TCD to be used to promote Democracy and be a tool for dialogue between Political Parties. Question: Why has TCD failed to build and protect Democracy? ANSWER: Our Constitutional System is not FRIENDLY. @fatma_karume

The extract above clearly shows that @fatma_karume believes that although there are institutions devoted to promoting democracy such as the Tanzania Commission for Democracy, they fail to achieve their objective due to the unfriendly constitutional system in Tanzania. Perhaps that is one of the main reasons for Tanzanian activists to devote much of their X platforms to mobilise for a new constitution.

Pertaining to good governance, Tanzanian activists are using their X accounts to campaign against some government actions, advising the government and

mobilizing citizens' power in the government. Among the government's initiatives that received a fierce online activists' reaction was the introduction of mobile transaction levy charges. One example from the data is the retweet by @MariaSTsehai below:

> RT @lifeofmshaba: The government should tighten the belt, there is no reason to increase CHARGES every day when there is a lot of unnecessary expenditure. #KataaTozo #WenyeNchiWanachi #ChangeTanzania

As the excerpt above indicates, people believed that the government should trim its expenditures and there was no need to burden the citizens with more charges. Interesting to note from the extract above is the hashtag #KataaTozo was used to campaign against the introduced mobile transaction charges. Among the messages accompanied by the hashtag was to mobilize people to avoid doing mobile transactions to demonstrate their disapproval of the charges.

Furthermore, Tanzanian activists use their social media platforms to advocate for citizens' power in the governance of their country. Activists seem to believe that the government has robbed the people of their power over the government, as the tweet by @fatma_karume below shows:

> In DEMOCRACY the President has no LAW. Laws belong to the CITIZENS because they are passed by the PARLIAMENT that REPRESENTS the people and not the President. The President must obey the LAWS of the CITIZENS. How did we get to the point where the President has his/her LAWS that he/she can use to HURT people who don't like him/her?

Looking into the above extract, @fatma_karume is sensitizing the citizens to realize that they have power over the President or government because the people elect representatives who enact laws on the people's behalf. The extract also implies that the

situation at the moment is the contrary where the President has the laws.

Finally, activists have used their X account to advocate for the rule of law by raising their voices against incidences of abuse of power done by government officials and advising the citizens on controlling abuse of power. An example of activists' concerns about abuse of power is seen in the extract from @fatma_karume below:

> So, you do understand very well the power of the Parliament!!! Why were you afraid to tell MAGUFULI that he was breaking the law when he ordered Government Offices to move to Dodoma without asking for a BUDGET from Parliament? He used our money without our CONSENT and you kept silent! Stop the stupid FEAR.

As the tone of the activist in the above extract shows, the activist is angry about the parliament's silence during the Late President Magufuli's government when he decided to move the government to Dodoma. Among other things, the exercise used government funds without following the procedures of the budget being allocated by the parliament. However, the parliament did not take any action despite its power being violated.

Improving the justice system and freedom of the people who practice the law is revealed to be another agenda of Tanzania's social media activists. The main argument by activists is that the justice system in the country is not free, as the tweet by @fatma_karume below indicates:

> The judiciary is not FREE! DPP is not FREE! They are just INSTRUCTIONS followers. They are lying to themselves and only fooling themselves. We told them #MboweSioGaidi from the beginning.

As the tweet above indicates, activists believe that the judiciary and the director of public prosecution are not free to execute their duties. According to activists, the appointment system and budget

allocation system are the main constraints to judiciary freedom, as the tweet below indicates:

> RT @JamiiForums: FATMA KARUME: We have created a Judiciary that cannot do its job. The President having the Power to APPOINT and REMOVE the Chief Justice undermines the Independence of the Judiciary. Also, the Judiciary relying on the Government Budget to carry out its activities undermines the independence of the Judiciary. #Democracy30

It is clear from the above extract that the fact that the President appoints the Chief Justice and the judiciary has to depend on a budget that is allocated by the government is strongly believed to weaken the prospects of this government pillar to be independent. Activists believe that political leaders and justice delivery organs need to prioritize justice over honour and embrace transparency and competition in the appointment of personnel in order to improve justice systems, as the extract below indicates:

> The appointment of judges is done without TRANSPARENCY or COMPETITION and the announcements of the appointment come out at midnight. You cannot have INDEPENDENCE of the Judiciary in this situation. ...1. Advertise the positions. 2. Ask people to apply. 3. Ask the applicants to sit an exam prepared by the Judicial Service Commission. 4. Interview the top candidates. 5. Appoint them.

The extract above criticizes the current appointment practice as lacking transparency and competitiveness. Then, it offers a recommendation to ensure transparency and competition by advertising for positions, calling for applications and evaluating the applicants before appointing them.

The Influence of Social Media Activism

The activists' data reveals that social media activism has influenced a number of changes in Tanzania. Among the notable achievements is the release of political prisoners such as Freeman Mbowe and his three colleagues who were detained for eight months with terrorism and economic sabotage charges. X activists raised their voices throughout that time using the hashtag #MboweSioGaidi (Mbowe is not a terrorist). The extract below is from a retweet by @fatma_karume in which Freeman Mbowe admits that he is free thanks to public power:

> RT @MariaSTsehai: "I was not released from prison because someone loves me, I was released from prison because the power of the public was so overwhelming." Absolutely Freeman Mbowe! Loud and clear! Citizens' trust on you is great.

In the excerpt above, Freeman Mbowe clearly admits that the public's tremendous strength resulted in his release from prison. Owing to the fact that public political gatherings at that time were prohibited in Tanzania, it is apparent that the public was using social media. In the extract below, Freeman Mbowe further explains the crucial role social media activists played in bringing the case to a victorious end:

> "Keyboard warriors did a great job of showing the progress of our case and I really thank them for providing information on the progress of the case. They enabled this case to become a case heard by many people. Their work has helped this case to be open to the public" - @freemanmbowetz @fatma_karume

The phrase "keyboard warriors" in the extract above refers to social media activists who were tweeting the proceedings of the case live from inside the courtroom. The tweets were rapidly shared across X and other platforms. This made the case to be of interest to international organisations. Finally, although the court had decided that Mbowe and colleagues had a case to answer, the director of public prosecution dropped the charges and Mbowe and colleagues were free.

Social media activism significantly influenced the Tanzania government to revise and later withdraw the mobile transactions charges. Tanzanians used the hashtag #KataaTozo to campaign online against the charges. The government reduced the mobile transactions charges by 30 percent in 2021 before the Minister of Information and ICT announced withdrawing them in 2023.

Furthermore, social media activism influenced the increasing awareness about the need for a new constitution in Tanzania. Although a new constitution is not yet attained, persistent posting about it using the #KatibaMpya hashtag has influenced legal reforms such as the National Electoral Commission (NEC) Bill, 2023, the Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Government Election Bill, 2023, and the Political Parties Affairs Laws Bill, 2023. These Bills are attempts to address some of the shortcomings of the current constitution.

Lastly, social media activism influenced the lifting of the ban on public political meetings. Social media activists persistently criticized the ban as unlawful and undemocratic. Consequently, the government lifted the ban on 3rd January 2023.

DISCUSSION

The research showed that Tanzanian activists utilized X as a venue for political and economic discourse, as a means of spreading information to raise awareness, and as a tool for human rights and democracy activism. The findings also demonstrated that Tanzanian social media activists have influenced a number of issues such as the release of political prisoners, publicizing the goals of the new constitution, removing the prohibition on political demonstrations in public spaces, and eliminating the charges on mobile transactions.

The following are some inferences that can be drawn from the findings: First, social media provides a safe space for political action and involvement, both of which are vital for a nation's democracy to flourish. Secondly, people can express themselves and be heard through social media, as demonstrated by the campaigns against mobile transaction charges. Thirdly, a small group of ardent internet activists have the power to drive change; however, the sustainability of the changes depends on the political environment of the place. Finally, even in the absence of elections, social media can contribute significantly to democratic development.

The results support the observation made by Kiranda et al. (2016) that the rise in smartphones, coupled with rising internet penetration and social media access, is intensifying political activism. Political communication and campaigning have been effectively promoted by social media platforms like Facebook, X, and YouTube. On social media, citizen-led campaigns around accountability and human rights have clearly been successful. The results further affirm that social media is frequently utilized as a vehicle for representation, a citizen journalism tool used to garner attention from a wider audience, and it can also be used locally to organize collective action, particularly as a vehicle for mobilization in the vital task of getting people onto the streets (Gerbaudo, 2012). However, success in using social media to mobilise people to take collective action appears to be limited probably due to what Mateos & Erro (2021) noted that contextual circumstances, local politics, and institutional norms play a role in how successful social media mobilization campaigns are in getting people to take collective action.

The concept of online listening, defined by Molina (2017) as reading other people's posts, tweets, chats, and comments, helps in explaining the findings of the study. The practice of online activism is made possible by online listening which is an important component of participation. Digital media-facilitated online political discussions create new public spaces for politics and new avenues for individuals to engage as (digital) citizens, all of which enhance our understanding of the mechanisms involved in political communication

(Molina, 2017). The findings of the study demonstrated that online listening is a crucial aspect of the success of online activism. It not only facilitates interaction among participants but also determines the outcome of such interactions. The fact that Tanzanian social media activists have achieved some of their objectives testifys to the practice of online listening.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Tanzanian social media activists used X for a variety of things, such as information sharing, discussing national political and economic issues, and advocating for democracy and human rights. Additionally, it was discovered that social media activists have influenced a variety of goals in their online activity, such as the release of political prisoners, publicizing the agenda for the new constitution, and lifting the prohibition on public political gatherings. Thus, we conclude that social media can be an effective instrument for reinforcing socio-political change, but its efficacy is contingent upon its responsible and skilful utilisation. It should be used strategically while observing the principles of digital citizenship. We recommend the inclusion of digital citizenship in Tanzania's civic education policy to instil the culture in the young generation, and training in content creation for activism and political social media.

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