

Cultural Identity and New Communication Technologies:

Political, Ethnic and Ideological Implications

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Chapter 6

New Media and Gender in East Africa: Assessing Media Dependency and Public Attitudes

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ABSTRACT

This study set out to ascertain the use of and dependency on new media technology for political communication by voting-age citizens of the three main East African countries, namely Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. We learn the importance of new media communication opportunities towards the struggle for liberal democracy, which is demonstrated by the unanimity of respondents' attitudes that their governments suppress political discourse. But the degree of use and dependence on these new media instruments are not uniform across the region. Gender and level of education are two salient factors that create these differences in the use of and dependency on new media technology for political communication in East Africa. But our findings have no bearing on the authenticity of the messages sent through these new media technological devices, or the extent of divisiveness or unity that such messages might engender among citizens in the region in times of political crises. Our primary contention is that such citizens now depend on these technological devices to serve their informational needs moreso when political and other forms of national emergency situations arise. This dependency phenomenon is partly the consequence of the existence of media laws enacted by governments in the region to hamstring mainstream media houses.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter investigates the use of new media for political communication by voting-age citizens across three major East African countries: Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, accounting for gender differences and levels of education, with primary focus on women in the broader scheme of new media use and dependency. One of the major reasons for focusing on these countries is because of their dominant presence in the region, which dates back to 1967 when they formed what is arguably the nucleus of the East African Community (EAC). The EAC now embraces five countries in the region.

Developments in new media technology have had significant impact on the content and delivery of messages in political communication, especially in periods of electioneering campaigns. King (1997) argues that elections are tripartite affairs between the contestants who are encoders of political messages, the electorate or decoders, and the media which serve as the bridge between both groups. However, the reality in modern times is that the institutionalized media's monopoly of the "bridge" is no longer tenable. Also, the flow of messages has ceased to be vertical or uni-dimensional.

With the increasingly pervasive use of new media technologies, message source in political communication has been decentralized (Anduiza, 2009), with the electorate being transformed from mere "passive receivers of a message constructed and controlled by established institutions" (Turiera-Puigbo, 2009, p. 14), to people who simultaneously produce, disseminate and consume political information.

This opportunity to construct and share information by the electorate poses new challenges to political parties and candidates in their role of mobilizing people for political participation (Anduiza, 2009; Montero, 2009). It was in response to this challenge that campaign strategists for John McCain and Barack Obama extensively used the

internet and other media platforms to reach the electorate in the 2008 U.S. presidential election (Kreiss, 2009; Turiera-Puigbo, 2009).

The impact of new communication technology in political communication is also substantial in other parts of the world such as South Korea (Lee, 2009) and the Philippines (Karan, Gimeno & Tandoc, 2009). In Europe for instance, the influence of political parties is on the decline due to the communication technology revolution (Zittel, 2009) and in China, the use of cellular phones is now an important factor in communication (Latham, 2007).

How about Africa, especially East Africa, which is the focus of this chapter? We acknowledge that the three main countries in that region – Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda – have always had political parties in their practice of democracy. However, the opposition in those countries have generally been marginalized or incapacitated by autocratic regimes since the countries gained independence. In reality, each of these nations is a *de facto* one-party state where government direct or subterranean control of communication channels has been prevalent. But, the advent of new communication technology now appears to offer citizens an alternative to controlled government sources of information.

For instance, the figures below show the level of cellular phone and internet opportunities available to the citizens of the three nations. According to the *World Factbook*, cell phone use in Kenya and Uganda in 2008 was 16.2 million and 8.6 million respectively, while Tanzania had 14.7 million users in 2009. Internet access in Uganda was 2 million in 2007 and 400,000 in Tanzania in the same year. Kenya's figure for 2008 was 3 million. The foregoing data show a modest explosion in the availability and use of new media communication channels in the East African region for mass mobilization, political contestation, and communication.

With regard to political participation and the extent of women's engagement in politics in the

region, these figures are salient to this study. Uganda has a population of 12.5 million men and 11.9 women (2002 census), but according to the 2009 report by the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU), an organization for national parliaments all over the world, women only constitute 30.7 percent of members of parliament (MPs) in the country. In Tanzania, women (17.6 million) also outnumber men (16.8 million) according to its 2007 population figure. Yet, the IPU report shows that only 30.4 percent of MPs in the country are women. The IPU figure for women MPs in Kenya is 9.8 percent, yet the country's 2007 population statistics show that Kenya had 18.5 million women and 17.7 million men.

While this number of female MPs in all three countries might be low, previous studies show a relatively high level of political participation by women given that factors such as culture, level of education and financial stability generally weigh against women in the region (see Kalyango & Winfield, 2009). We observe that in spite of these modest gains by women in East African politics, and the expanded new media opportunities in the region, no known studies have specifically addressed the issue of gender, political communication and new media in East Africa. What is available is a handful of studies about women and affirmative action and gender equality attributes in the media (Kalyango & Winfield, 2009; Tamale, 1999; Tripp, 2000). We, hence, investigate and evaluate the use of new media for political communication in the region, with emphasis on women, gender differences and levels of education.

This study draws from the media dependency theory developed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976). The scholars suggest that media dependency is pervasive in modern societies, and define dependency as "a relationship in which the satisfaction of needs or the attainment of goals by one party is contingent upon the resources of another party" (p.6). We examine media dependency within the context of the growing use of new

media communications facilities in East Africa, by specifically looking at trends in political communication in the region. We attempt to provide empirical evidence to these questions: In what ways do women in East Africa use the mobile cell phones and the internet to learn about politics and to express their political views? How strongly do women in the region regard text messaging as a quick and immediate source of political information vis-à-vis other media? Which means of communication do women in the three countries rely upon as their first choice of information source in times of national emergencies? Do public attitudes towards new media and national politics vary between users based on their gender within provinces in each country and across East Africa when we account for education levels?

MEDIA DEPENDENCY: THEORY AND LITERATURE

The Media Systems Dependency (MSD) theory as developed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) was not simply an intellectual effort to formulate and add another layer to the existing repertoire of media effects theories. The scholars specifically asserted that media dependency is largely heightened and sustained by two factors: When the need for information is central to decision making, and "when there is a high degree of structural instability in the society due to conflict and change" (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, p. 7). Natural disasters such as the tsunami that hit south-east Asia in 2004, Hurricane Katrina that ravaged New Orleans in 2005 and the earthquake that devastated Haiti in 2010 equally fuel a sense of dependency on media messages especially for families of the victims of the disasters.

This assertion implicitly recognizes that the degree and sustenance of media dependency vary from person to person and groups (Salwen, 1987). Skumanich and Kintsfather (1998) also add that one medium might satisfy multiple dependency

goals. On the other hand, several individuals may use one medium to satisfy their collective dependency.

MSD theory is anchored on individuals' goals and the resources available to the media to facilitate the attainment of those goals (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989; Grant, Guthrie & Ball-Rokeach, 1991). As such, the theory is predicated on a relational paradigm. It goes beyond an individual's exposure to media messages (Becker & Whitney, 1980), to linking his or her goals to the capacity of the media to satisfy the goals. As enunciated by Ball-Rokeach (1985), "dependency" is about goals set by individuals and the extent to which such goals are fulfilled by the media. Dependency therefore structurally weakens as the media's inability to facilitate the realization of those goals increases, and vice versa.

These individual goals are compartmentalized into three: play, orientation and understanding (Ball-Rokeach, 1985; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989; Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 1993). Each dimension is further sub-divided into two, with understanding referring to the goals of "self" discovery or knowing about oneself, or about going beyond self to be acquainted with one's community or "social" environment; orientation is about an "action" such as deciding what dress to purchase and where to buy it, and the "interaction" involved in reaching out to learn how to handle situations; and play or engagement involves issues such as "solitary" play in relaxing with a beer or "social" play which involves group activity such as partying with friends.

Further refinement of MSD expands it beyond its original, micro, individualist focus to a broader and macro, ecological perspective. This entails the examination of the tripartite relationship between the audience, media systems and society at large. The premise is that human society is like an ecological system which is an amalgamation of individuals, groups, associations etc. These sub-sets are structurally interlinked and their dependencies are reciprocal. The media are

concerned with information gathering, processing and dissemination but they depend on other members of society's ecological system to perform their functions. In other words, media power is contingent upon dependency relations with other organizations, and this has implications for media system dependency for the individual (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989; Ball-Rokeach, Power, Guthrie & Waring, 1990; Ball-Rokeach, 1998).

Although "MSD is a theory in progress" with micro and macro manifestations (Ball-Rokeach et al 1990, p. 249), its application to research has been substantial. In a cross-cultural study about mobile phone dependency, Wei (2009) found that Chinese high-school students depended more on their mobile telephones for orientation and play than their American counterparts. Another study in China (Tai & Sun, 2007) underscored the heightened nature of media dependence in crisis situations, as in the case of the SARS epidemic in 2003.

Much as these studies show great latitude in the use of MSD theory, the advent of the internet and other forms of social media still require some critical reexamination of the application of the theory, particularly in Africa. Ball-Rokeach (1998) has a robust appraisal of this new information regime. She concedes that MSD is not a "revolutionary" but an "evolutionary" theory. It is our contention that there is need to expand the theory to the new realities brought about by new information technologies, where they seem to play a major role in East Africa for political mobilization. The traditional notion of dependence on formal media systems must be reappraised to account for dependence on other social media in East Africa.

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION, NEW MEDIA AND MSD

Political communication is a multi-disciplinary field that straddles across mass communication,

political science, psychology, sociology, philosophy, all of which study communication in political settings largely at three main pedestals of analysis: the individual, institutions and systems (Perloff, 1998). This multi-dimensional character of the discipline does not predispose it to having a generally acceptable conceptual definition.

For instance, Denton and Woodward (1990) see political communication as discussions about resource allocation – with authority to govern and how sanctions are to be imposed in a political system. McNair (2007) and Graber (1981) conceptualize it as purposeful communication about politics that incorporates verbal, written and visual forms. Truman (2008) notes that it is “the discursive process by which political information is shared and promotes awareness, ignorance, manipulation, consent, dissent, action, or passivity” in the political environment (p. 8).

While these definitions add value to the understanding of the nature of political communication, this study will adopt the definition offered by Chaffee (1975) and adapted by Kaid (2004). Chafee suggests that political communication is about the “role of communication in the political process” (p.15). This suggestion is premised on the fact that participatory democracy entails the flow of communication between and among the various segments of a society, from individuals to organizations (Gastil, 2008). Such communication is pivotal to having an informed citizenry and winning elections, and it comes in various forms and across multiple media platforms. In the East African context therefore, we see the role and means of sharing information about politics and the political process amongst citizens, as the central theme in political communication.

Modern political communication is no longer confined to the traditional provision of information by contestants and institutions for consumption by the electorate. It is now a public dialogue between political office seekers and potential voters (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009). Thus the one-to-many or candidate-to-electorate model of political com-

munication is increasingly making way for the more interactive many-to-many system brought about by new communication technologies (Karan, Tandoc & Gimeno, 2009).

The huge diversification of these means or platforms for information sharing as a result of modern communications and technological development, has effectively challenged the orthodoxy of formal media organizations, which had monopolized information gathering, processing and dissemination in electoral campaign periods in East Africa. Consequently, new media technology has expanded the scope of media dependency on the part of the electorate. As Tedesco (2004) observes, “the Internet appeared boundless to limits of individual expression, provided hope for lateral communication structure, and offered promise to sever the hierarchical public dependence on the established media” (p. 510).

In this regard, the primary source of political communication among the electorate in the region appears to be the mobile phone. Some scholars have argued that its portability and affordability has made it one of the most sought-after (political) communication devices in most parts of the world (Karan et al., 2009), and especially in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania where other electronic communication devices remain largely unaffordable.

The “swift emergence of the internet as a communication tool” (Tai & Sun, p.993) and the burgeoning use of new social media in political communication are not symptomatic of the death of traditional forms of communication. Rife, Lacy and Varouhakis (2008) examined studies on new media technology and concluded that the Internet’s capacity to displace traditional media may not be as realistic as some scholars predict. Anduiza (2009) is more succinct as she presents the Internet hype as no more than “inflated utopias.” This may still be the case in Africa despite the remarkable growth of the information technology sector; because majority of citizens in rural areas of East Africa still depend on other traditional media such as radio for all aspects of political

communication (Kalyango 2009, Kalyango & Eckler, 2010). Even among residents in the urban areas, the availability of disposal income might limit ownership of the device. As documented in the *World Fact Book*, the 2009 estimated Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in the three East African nations was \$1,600 in Kenya, \$1,300 in Uganda, and \$1,400 in Tanzania. These low income levels suggest a restricted affordability of the device in the region.

Nevertheless, what is hardly in contention is that the Internet and new media technology have changed the landscape of political communication in the three countries examined here. The challenge in this study therefore is to examine how this change affects media dependency and public attitudes in the region as a whole, plus within and across 15 provinces in the region.

EAST AFRICA: MEDIA POLICIES AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

East Africa is located on the eastern coast of sub-Saharan Africa and includes the three sovereign states of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Some geographers place Rwanda and Ethiopia in the greater East Africa, but this study is only concerned with the political triad of the former communal East Africa. Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda share common borders, markets, legislature, Lake Victoria, the Kiswahili language, and a common passport under the administrative umbrella of the East African Community (EAC).

Despite the existence of the EAC as a regional intergovernmental organization and symbol of unity among Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, each of these countries has a unique political culture and ideologically unique regime as some of the factors which differentiate them, and which sometimes contradict the common political, economic and administrative goals of regional cooperation (Kalyango & Eckler, 2010). Consequently, the assumptions here are that the major challenges

facing the future of the East African political federation include the variations in characteristics of political participation, contestation by citizens based on gender, and the fragility of news media advocacy to educate citizens on their political rights and civic duties.

The political independence gained by Uganda (1962), Kenya (1963), and the Union of Tanzania (1964) did not result in jettisoning all administrative and legal relics of the ousted colonial regimes in these countries. The government-media relationship is one area where the incoming indigenous governments were not in a rush to discard the legacy of their predecessors.

Ng'weno (1969) contends that while censorship did not officially exist in the region, the East African governments had enormous powers to curb press freedom in those early post-colonial years. Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania all had restrictive sedition laws that were inherited from the British and were kept in the statute books almost unchanged. He further asserts that the governments had preventive detention acts which empowered them to detain without trial those responsible for acts and statements (including newspaper reports) considered by the governments to threaten their national interests.

What Ng'weno observed over forty years ago is still a largely legitimate comment about the nature of press freedom in contemporary East Africa, and other parts of Africa. But, quite curiously, Skjerdal (2008) opines that what is prevalent in Africa is not official censorship but self-censorship. The author describes self-censorship as something triggered by "perceived external pressure which leads journalists to alter media content in order to avoid personal reprimands and stay clear of accusations of inciting social and political tensions" (p.185). Such an argument tends to ignore the reality that a journalist's self-censorship is merely symptomatic of a much greater debilitating precursor and malaise – the official censorship.

Evidence of official censorship abounds in the East African region. As recently as 2007, the

Ugandan government introduced a controversial draft bill – the Interception of Communications Bill - daubed by the media as the phone-tapping bill. This bill grants the Ugandan government powers to monitor telephone conversations for national security purposes. In 2008, the Kenyan government also introduced its latest media gag bill. The British Broadcasting Corporation reported on its web site (January 2, 2009) that the “Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki has signed into law a media bill that journalists say will curtail press freedom. The law gives the Kenyan authorities the power to raid media offices, tap phones and control broadcast content on grounds of national security.” In the case of Tanzania, Mulama (2008) reported that the government has laws in place that empower it to confiscate broadcasting equipment and muzzle the press.

While it is relatively easy for the governments of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda to attempt to shackle institutionalized media houses, the advent of new media technology is posing a threat to their control of news and dissemination of current affairs in the region. Kenya is a good example of this official dilemma. In the wake of the 2007 presidential election in the country, the government exercised its legal muscle and prohibited live news broadcasts in the country amidst allegations of election rigging by the Kibaki administration. The unintended consequence of this action was the soaring of politically inflammatory messages through mobile phone texting or SMS (short message service) and the blogosphere among Kenyans.

In a policy briefing paper sponsored by the British Broadcasting Corporation’s (BBC) World Service Trust, Abdi and Deane (2008) contended that in the confusion following the disputed Kenyan election, the government unsuccessfully tried to shut down the SMS facility provided by Safaricom, the country’s leading provider of cell phone services. The authors quote the company’s former general manager, Michael Joseph, as saying that his organization came under intense pressure from government to suspend its SMS service on

December 31, 2007 (four days after the election) but they resisted the interference “because we felt that panic might ensue” (p.10).

This Kenyan experience imposed unprecedented and unanticipated limitations on government’s ability to control the content of information that gets to the public. On the other hand, it flung open new vistas in political communication among citizens. In this regard, Mwesige (2009) and Kalyango (2009) argue that talk radio, in the case of Uganda, has expanded the platform for the expression of alternative opinion by the opposition, major stakeholders and citizens in the country. Kalyango (2009) specifically found considerable use of radio for political information, but no direct influence on support for democracy. He also determined that greater use of radio to get political news in East Africa was strongly related to measures of political interest; and that political interest was a moderating factor for democratic support. Our contention here is that the penetration of new media technology, especially the cellular phones, has even quadrupled opportunities for this expression and exchange of political information among citizens of the East African region.

The downside of this new opportunity is obvious: It can be used for negative purposes, as was the case in Kenya where new media technology was used to circulate messages that fuelled the electoral crisis. While this is true, and efforts should be made to curtail such technology abuse, what is of greater significance is that new media technology is challenging information gathering and dissemination and government control of information in East Africa. The negative attributes, however, do not diminish the benefits of mobilizing citizens to engage in political discourse or protests during national emergencies. With rapid innovations in information technology such as the internet and mobile electronic devices, citizens can no longer be starved of political information merely because government has clamped down on established media organizations (McMillan, 2006). They can originate and share such information through the

use of their mobile phones' text messaging facility and other new technology devices.

DATA AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Data for this study are based on a survey of public attitudes on some key models of media dependency and media use in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. A cross-sectional survey of East Africans was conducted between June 2 and July 30, 2007. A total of 1,395 surveys in Tanzania (n=465), Kenya (n=448), and Uganda (n=482) were returned out of the 1,500 surveys that were randomly handed out. Citizens were selected using a stratified multi-stage cluster random sampling. A "citizen" of East Africa is defined as an individual over 18 years of age who resides in one of the three countries, and who can articulate his/her interests and attitudes based on reasoning and consciousness.

The media (radio, television, newspapers, online news, mobile phone texting or SMS messaging) are assessed here as monolithic concepts of traditional media and new media. The new media in this context are the online news, mobile phone texting or SMS messaging. During data collection, we considered the fact that radio is very popular among both rural and urban dwellers and that other media such as television are restricted largely to urban dwellers who can afford TV sets and in areas with electricity (Kalyango, 2009). We also considered that mobile phones are available to both literate and illiterate citizens in urban areas who can afford them (Kalyango & Eckler, 2010). Households and individuals who are exposed and use some or all of these media were surveyed.

A total of 28 field survey coordinators were recruited from East Africa to administer these surveys from house to house, at workplaces, and also at academic and public/state institutions. The survey instrument was given to respondents in hard copy (paper format) as a face-to-face survey. Respondents filled out either an English version or a translated version of the survey in Kiswahili,

the most widely spoken language in the region. A face-to-face survey was administered instead of other data collection methods because more than 80 percent of the population has no access to a conventional land telephone line and an estimated 60 percent of residences or citizens in East Africa do not have access to a physical-address infrastructure where a mail-in or a self-administered survey can be effectively sent.

The survey instrument was first administered in a pilot study to four Africans studying at a major Midwestern university in the United States, as well as to five people resident in Tanzania, five in Uganda, and five in Kenya, to ascertain the reliability of the items that were used to construct the scales, before they were used. Field survey coordinators were matched with a province of their ethnicity or residence where their presence would create trust and comfort to respondents in order to minimize sensitivity, inaccuracy, and biased responses. For comparative purposes, the same survey instrument and questions were used in all three countries.

Items on the instrument utilized attitude measurements of media systems dependency (MSD), gender, levels of education, national politics, national security, and good governance to assess the citizens' degree of strong agreement or strong disagreement. Other items sought opinion about news coverage and political information on traditional media vs. the new media, and about the government and the presidency. Respondents were asked on some items to check the response that best corresponded with their opinion on point values assigned for items such that the higher the score, the more positive the response was. MSD was evaluated based – first of all, on *media consumption* (use of various media), *orientation* (degree of their attitudes), and *engagement* (reaction to or participation). MSD was predicted to have occurred based on the assumption that the higher an index of consumption towards a particular medium, and orientation or engagement towards an issue or national emergency, the more

respondents have been impacted and the more they are likely to depend on the medium. The scale was scored by summing the point values of the responses, and then dividing them by the total number of responses. All items were coded such that a more positive (accepting) attitude toward the outcome variable received the higher response value.

The hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) statistical technique was employed to properly reflect the structure of the dataset with citizens grouped within their respective provinces in East Africa. HLM is a class of techniques used to analyze data that have a nested structure (Kang & Kwak, 2003; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). This method estimates how attitudes towards new media and national politics vary across 15 provinces of East Africa. The provinces are central, northern, eastern, southern, and western in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The 15 provinces (also geopolitically referred to as “regions” in Uganda) make up the major populated parts in the East African region. Sample sizes averaged about 92 citizens per province. Provinces are considered here because they account for the nature of geopolitics, ethnic fragmentation, and because of the assumption that national political issues are likely to influence provincial (or local) politics.

HLM was employed to answer the following question: do public attitudes towards new media and national political discourse vary between users based on their gender within each country and across East Africa when we account for education levels? The HLM application consisted of two sets of linear regression equations for predictor variables at two levels. The level 1 model assessed individuals within provinces and then nested at level 2 across all provinces of East Africa.

The model estimated how the consumption of new media led to public attitudes within provinces and across provinces in times of national emergencies and anxiety, accounting for levels of education and engagement. Attention was restricted to three predictor variables (national

emergencies) $1j$ + (women) $2j$, and (education levels) $3j$. Province-level predictors include (mean-national emergencies) $1w$ + (mean-gender) $2w$, and (mean-education levels) $3w$, to assess media systems dependency.

RESULTS

Descriptive Findings

The survey yielded 1,395 complete responses in Tanzania (n=465), Kenya (n=448), and Uganda (n=482). Of the total sample, 712 (51%) were women and 683 (49%) were men. There were 210 (46.9%) men and 238 (53.1%) women in Kenya, 239 (49.6%) men and 243 (50.4%) women respondents in Uganda, and 234 (50.4%) men and 231 (49.6%) women in Tanzania. Among all respondents, 799 (57.3%) had completed high school and only 388 (27.8%) had completed a bachelors degree; and the rest of the respondents (14.9%) reported that they had not completed a high school diploma.

Participants also described their dependency on the media, namely: newspapers, radio, television, and Internet news, and mobile text messaging for information and current affairs. In Uganda, 74.5% (n=482) of respondents indicated that they listen to the news on radio four or more days a week, compared to 66% (n=448) in Kenya and 78% (n=465) in Tanzania. In Uganda, 56.1% (n=481) watch television four or more days in a typical week compared to 58.3% (n=448) in Kenya and 49.3% (n=465) respondents in Tanzania.

Data indicate that more East African respondents depend on phone text messaging than on newspapers as a source of information during emergencies. A slight majority of respondents throughout East Africa also indicated that they depend on phone text messaging than television as a source of information during emergencies. The Internet and newspapers are the least dependable source of information during emergencies. See

Table 1 for details on media use, also categorized by gender differences.

Overall, respondents who completed a high school education and beyond in Uganda (n=266), Kenya (n=287) and Tanzania (n=246) were more likely to get news from radio and television than from the Internet. However, respondents who completed a high school education and beyond in Kenya and Uganda depend more on the Internet than on newspapers as the main source of dependable information about politics, but not in Tanzania, $\chi^2 (df = 3) 19.16, p < .009$. Those without a high school education in Uganda (n = 216), Kenya (n=186) and Tanzania (n=194) were

more likely to get news from newspapers than from the internet. Data also indicate that all Tanzanian respondents, regardless of their level of education are more likely to depend on texting as their dependable source political information than their Kenyan and Ugandan counterparts who use that medium. Respondents in Kenya and Uganda are more likely to depend more on the Internet as the main source of dependable information about politics than Tanzanian respondents. See Table 2 for details on media use about politics, also categorized by education differences.

Respondents in Kenya and Uganda trust political information in their newspapers more than

Table 1. Dependable source of information during emergencies, by gender category

	KENYA		TANZANIA		UGANDA	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Radio	99	85	97	98	103	94
Television	59	54	59	56	58	62
Newspapers	9	8	11	13	2	12
Internet	7	6	3	4	8	4
Texting	64	57	61	63	72	67
Total	238*	210*	231*	234*	243*	239*

Notes: The difference between the sources of information is significant, $\chi^2 (df = 4) 36.14, p < .001$. For mean differences in dependable media outlets between countries: * = $p < .05$; *** = $p < .001$ Gender differences on dependable sources between countries, not statically significant, $p > .05$

Table 2. Main source of dependable information about politics, by education category

	KENYA		TANZANIA		UGANDA	
	Higher Education	No High School	Higher Education	No High School	Higher Education	No High School
Newspapers	15%	10%	19%	17%	14%	6%
Radio	33%	36%	38%	42%	34%	45%
Internet	19%	3%	16%	3%	20%	2%
Texting	5%	24%	10%	14%	4%	12%
Television	27%	27%	17%	24%	29%	35%
	$\chi^2 (df = 3) 19.16, p < .009$		$\chi^2 (df = 3) 16.79, p = .019$		$\chi^2 (df = 3) 21.13, p = .017$	

Notes: The “Higher Education” column refers to respondents who had completed high school, tertiary education diploma, as well as respondents with a college or advanced; The percentages are based on the following data: Respondents who had completed high school and beyond in Kenya (n=287) and those without a high school diploma (n=186). In Tanzania, respondents who had completed high school and beyond (n=246) and those without a high school diploma (n=194). In Uganda, the respondents with high school diplomas and beyond were (n=266) and no high school diploma (n=216).

in Tanzania, but there is a statistically significant difference in public attitudes towards newspapers in the three countries. Of the five media types examined here, respondents in all three countries trust political information on the Internet more than they trust political information on radio, television, newspapers, and mobile phone texting. Furthermore, the Internet was the only online media outlet in which positive public attitudes on that question of ‘trust’ were not statistically significant between the three countries (at the 99% alpha level).

Nearly all respondents in Kenya and Uganda strongly agreed that the Internet and phone texting are good for democracy (Kenya = 7.0 and Uganda = 6.31) and that the majority of respondents who have used cell phones also indicated that they have called and sent text messages to radio talk shows about politics (Kenya = 6.89, Tanzania = 6.91, and Uganda = 6.76). As Table 3 shows, the levels of strong disagreement are nearly identical in all countries (Kenya = 1.13, Tanzania = 1.31, Uganda, 1.07) that governments should regulate mobile phone texting of political information.

Respondents in all three countries also agree or strongly agree that the government wire taps their mobile phones and the government often suppresses political discourse. See Table 3 for details on public attitudes towards the media and national political discourse between the three countries.

HLM was employed to estimate the extent to which public attitudes towards new media and national politics vary between users based on their gender within each country and across East Africa when we account for education levels. The level 1 estimates exhibit results from two multi-level logistic regression models on citizens’ media dependency for three predictor variables. The *P*-value for β_{01} (national emergencies) at level-1 of the One-way ANOVA with random effects was 0.036, which implies that there is a significant between-gender variance in media dependency during national emergencies. The ICC (intra-class correlation) is .047, according to the formula from Raudenbush & Bryk (2002). In other words, about 5 percent of the variance in the citizen’s dependency (use) of the media during national emergencies could be attributed to

Table 3. Public attitudes towards the media and national political discourse

	Kenya	Tanzania	Uganda
Trust political information in newspapers	5.97	4.08	4.93***
Trust political information on radio	4.74	5.19	5.87*
Trust political information on television	4.60	4.33	3.98*
Trust political information on internet	6.13	6.28	6.40
Emergency phone texting messages necessary	6.88	6.91	6.93
Government should regulate information texting	1.13	1.31	1.07
Have texted a message to inform or alert others	6.89	6.91	6.76
Have phoned/texted talk-radio about politics	6.33	6.16	6.59
Have called/texted TV talk shows about politics	6.11	5.83	6.39*
Written letters to newspaper editors about politics	1.29	1.21	2.29*
Used or would use the internet to discuss politics	6.83	6.34	6.49
Internet/phone texting is good for democracy	7.0	5.01	6.31***
The government wire taps my mobile phone	5.78	3.39	5.21*
Government often suppresses politics discourse	6.01	5.11	6.22**

Notes: For mean differences between countries: * = $p < .05$; *** = $p < .001$; Scale: (1= low, 7=high)

the gender differences. That correlation gives us confidence to proceed with multilevel modeling since some social science disciplines, such as sociology and psychology, prefer an ICC which is higher than 30% to provide substantial benefits for the HLM analysis.

Model 2 added all level-1 predictors to the model, which is the Means-as-Outcome Regression. This model allows levels of education and gender variation in media dependency, but fixes all demographic effects to be the same across gender in the three countries. In general, women, men, highly educated citizens with access to all or a few media outlets or interest in political information are all accounted for in the estimations. Model 3 entered all predictor variables. Gender closeness is positively related to newspaper use. Women are more likely to use the media for political discourse when they are more educated beyond a high school completion. Most interestingly, the dependency on media (as a whole) by women is positively associated with both less educated and highly educated citizens in Kenya and Uganda ($\gamma_{03} = .041, p < .01$) while less educated women (without a high school diploma) are negatively associated with media dependency in Tanzania ($\gamma_{04} = -.027, p < .01$).

The estimated variance on public attitudes towards the new media (Internet and mobile phone texting) and national political discourse across all provinces was statistically significant in Uganda ($\gamma_{10} = 0.041, SE = 0.011; p < 0.05$) and not significant across all provinces in Kenya ($\gamma_{10} = 0.033, SE = 0.008; p > 0.05$) and Tanzania ($\gamma_{10} = 0.044, SE = 0.019; p > 0.05$), when gender and education were added to the model. Overall, the new media did not influence citizens across all 15 provinces in East Africa on issues of political information when we account for the citizens' gender and education levels across the region ($\gamma_{10} = 0.054, SE = 0.032; p > 0.05$). This implies that individual East Africans, who are influenced by the media on matters of political information, do not collectively report the Internet and mobile

phone texting as their main source of dependable information about politics across the region regardless of their level of education.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to ascertain the use of and dependency on new media technology for political communication by voting-age citizens of the three main East African countries, namely Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. We also investigated how citizens use new media technology by considering any differences in gender and level of education to inform their political views. These are factors that might indicate public attitudes toward sources of communication and information sharing in the region.

Our findings suggest that the advent of new media communication technologies is good for the development of democracy in the East African region. This includes Uganda where a previous study had found no radio influence on support for democracy without other intervening factors such as interest in politics (Kalyango, 2009). The importance of this finding is further underscored by the fact that respondents who engage in political participation through call-ins to radio and television programs acknowledge doing so through the use of their mobile phones and SMS texting facilities.

We learn the importance of new media communication opportunities towards the struggle for liberal democracy, which is demonstrated by the unanimity of respondents' attitudes that their governments suppress political discourse (see Table 3). Given that governments in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania have various anti-press laws as posited earlier in this study, new communications technology therefore provide needed avenues for citizens to voice and challenge their governments' repressive regulations on information dissemination in the system.

While citizens in all three countries gather information from a variety of media available to them, our findings indicate that they *trust* information on the Internet more than any other source. This is a welcome development, particularly in a region where the use of new technologies such as the Internet is still very limited in major towns and community centres in all three countries. But the question of access to the Internet cannot be ignored with regard to this finding. The issue of minimal Internet access is perhaps a plausible explanation as to why the respondents in the three countries also said they were more likely to get their news from the radio and television than the Internet.

However, it is noteworthy that when Internet access is available, respondents in Kenya and Uganda would prefer using it as a news source than newspapers. As Table 2 illustrates, Tanzanian respondents did not indicate this. In addition, this situation in Kenya and Uganda is largely attributable to respondents having a minimum of high school education, as Table 1 illustrates. Moreover, it is obvious that a modest level of education is required to effectively use the Internet. The *World Fact Book* shows that the literacy level in Kenya is 85%. In Uganda, it is 66%, while in Tanzania it is 69%. Education also plays a role in the source of news about politics in particular as respondents with less than high school education in all three countries are more likely to rely on newspapers for such news. Yet, quite curiously, despite their level of education, respondents in Tanzania showed a preference for text messaging as their main source of political information.

Notwithstanding their levels of education and sources of information, survey respondents across Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania acknowledge a measure of dependency on the media for news and political communication. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) postulate that media dependency is triggered by the need for information for decision-making, and the ability of the media to satisfy this need. Our findings suggest that the suppression of unfavorable political discourse and

the enactment of anti-press laws by governments in the East African region heighten the yearnings for information by citizens in all three countries. The findings also show that the use of new media outlets, especially the Internet and mobile phone text messaging, satisfies this need.

Equally prominent in MSD literature is the contention that structural instability in society also breeds media dependency (Ball-Rokeach, 1985; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). Accordingly, respondents in all 15 provinces not only depend on the media for information during national emergencies but rely more on mobile phone text messaging in such periods than newspapers and even the television.

Our conceptualization of national emergencies is not limited to natural catastrophes. Kenya's post presidential election violence in December 2007 was a major national emergency in the country. Earlier on, we had indicated how the SMS text messaging facility and the blogs became vital channels for exchanging political messages among Kenyans in that post election period when their government imposed a ban on live broadcasts. The people had to depend on new media sources to acquaint themselves with developments in that crisis period to satisfy their informational needs and to decide on their mode of engagement or response to the unfolding political violence. Kenya's president Mwai Kibaki, in early 2007 had supported Article 19 of the Kenya Media Bill in parliament, which sought to regulate "reckless and irresponsible journalism." The use of traditional media such as radio and new media (mobile phones) between citizens and media commentators mobilized the masses to reject its enactment, and ultimately forced parliament to reject the repressive clauses in late 2007 (Kalyango & Eckler, 2010). This was a critical victory and a good indication that the emergence of new media technologies with a fairly critical independent media, which exposes the shortcomings of the Kenyan government, can succeed in mobilizing the masses against repressive government measures.

However, we do not make the argument that the new media facilities completely displaced the newspapers, radio and television in that period. We agree with Rife et al (2008) that new media technology may not have the capacity to completely displace traditional forms of communication. In the Kenyan example as well as in Tanzania, the new platforms are only quickly filling a void in an environment where government intervened and suppressed information gathering and dissemination by the established media. In Tanzania, the government and the ruling party, CCM, still own and control a national radio station, *Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam*, a national television station, *Televisheni ya Taifa*, and two national newspapers: the English-language *Daily News* and the Swahili-language *Uhuru* (Tripp, 2000). Yet, the use of mobile phones by Tanzanians to interact with and engage in the national political discourse by calling radio and television talk shows makes the people more assertive, visible, and at the same time still dependent on traditional broadcast media.

Our focus on new media technology should also not be misconstrued that they are the only sources of information during national emergencies. We recognize that other forms of communication, including inter-personal and inter-group channels, also play a role in such periods. We are also mindful that external or non-media agents influence messages disseminated through new media technology because human society is more like an ecological system where the various components in it relate to and impact one another (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989; Ball-Rokeach, 1998).

The practical implication of this cross-fertilization of influences is that by trusting, depending on and using new media technology, recipients of messages from new media sources get a variety of opinions that have implications for their levels of media dependency. On the other hand, governments realize that such messages might well emanate from opposition groups, hence, as in the case of Kenya, the Kibaki administration

unsuccessfully tried to disrupt SMS text messaging in the post election period. Or, in Uganda where Museveni's government introduced the phone-tapping bill against the backdrop of the forthcoming (now held) presidential election in 2011.

The continued use and dependence on the new media technology by people in East Africa will however be a function of the extent to which information gained from them satisfies peoples' needs for, as Ball-Rokeach (1985) argues, media dependency weakens when the media are no longer able to satisfy the goals set by consumers of media messages.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated new media use and media dependency in East Africa from a holistic perspective. First, the nested HLM analysis shows gender disparity in the use and dependence on new media technology for political communication when levels of education are factored in. The findings are illustrated in Table 3. However, this window of disparity which is narrow at five percent is understandably so. One plausible explanation is that attitudes toward the use of new technology for people who have attained substantial educational standards and for whom access to new media technology is not an impediment are not likely to vary a great deal.

The within-provinces findings however differentiate women in East Africa on their use of new media technology for political discourse on the basis of their levels of educational attainment. In addition, while media dependency was found to cut across women of all education levels in Kenya and Uganda, in Tanzania women without high school qualification were not so dependent on the media. We did not specifically investigate the reasons for this, but we can reasonably conjecture that people in such low-level education group are expectedly not literate enough to take

advantage of new technological devices nor can they indeed afford them.

Future studies can specifically examine that issue.

We conclude this analysis by reasserting that new media technology, especially the mobile phone text messaging and internet facilities, is gaining ground as a means of political communication among East African citizens. But our findings have no bearing on the authenticity of the messages sent through these new media technological devices, or the extent of divisiveness or unity that such messages might engender among citizens in the region in times of political crises.

Our primary contention is that such citizens now depend on these technological devices to serve their informational needs more so when political and other forms of national emergency situations arise. This dependency phenomenon is partly the consequence of the existence of media laws enacted by governments in the region to hamstring mainstream media houses. But the degree of use and dependence on these new media instruments are not uniform across the region. Gender and the level of education are two salient factors that create these differences in the use of and dependency on new media technology for political communication in East Africa.

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