Social Media Censorship and Freedom of Expression In Tanzania. A Case of Ilala District, Dar Es Salaam

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the level of social media censorship and the freedom of expression among social media users in Ilala District, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to explore levels of awareness of mechanisms for managing censorship and regulatory frameworks affecting social media users. The results also revealed that concerning social media censorship, the majority of people had a different comprehension of it, where a big proportion of the respondents showed a limited understanding of the laws and policies regarding it. Results indicated that only 58% of participants were aware of the Tanzanian laws concerning social media surveillance; this represents a critical gap in knowledge. Users are reacting to censorship by self-censoring, encrypted communication, and activism. The study also emphasizes increasing public education on social media regulations and digital literacy to protect freedom of expression in an increasingly regulated online space. Such findings go toward policy development and add to the broad debate over digital rights and freedom of expression.

Keywords: *Social Media Censorship, Freedom of Expression, Digital Rights.*

INTRODUCTION

Freedom of expression is widely regarded as a basic human right. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights codified that. It protects an individual's right to hold opinions, and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas without unwarranted interference. Now, it has a new, influential arena in social media. In 2021, approximately 4.26 billion people were using social media worldwide; anticipated to increase to almost 6 billion by 2027.

Yet, the juncture of freedom of expression and censorship on social media is a very complex test. Social media platforms give an avenue for heterogeneous voices and opinions, but they are also sections to which censorship practices can limit the variability of views shared online (Kiezman et al., 2021). Absence of censorship could encourage a host of vices like hate speech and misinformation, thereby making life more difficult for social media companies while balancing user rights against regulatory compliance.

The different interpretations and enforcements of laws related to hate speech, defamation, and national security in various countries further complicate this landscape. Contemporary social media platforms allow for rapid and pervasive opportunities for interaction-both geographically and politically-bound-that have increased compared to traditional media gatekeepers of the past, both in terms of communication and possibility of misuse.

This has been the result of the ever-growing communications sector in Tanzania. As of September 2022, close to 58.1 million active SIM cards and internet use significantly jumped from 29.2 million to 31.1 million users in just a few months. By September 2022, there were almost 58.1 million active SIM cards, while internet usage increased significantly, jumping from 29.2 million to 31.1 million users in just a few months. In spite of that fact, the government of Tanzania has implemented questionable laws which put online expression under surveillance, with penalties for disseminating false information considered one of them.

While the current government, led by President Samia Suluhu Hassan, has scaled down the arrests of people for comments perceived to be critical, users are still under threat and legal action over dissenting views.

The research was guided by the following questions in an attempt to understand Social Media censorship and freedom of expression, using Ilala district as a case study:

i) What is the level of awareness of social media censorship and freedom of expression among social media users in Tanzania?

ii) What perceptions do social media users have about the social media censorship laws in Tanzania?

iii) What mechanisms are employed by social media users to cope with censorship in Tanzania?

Because freedom of expression is invariably linked to the censorship of social media, the demands for continued research into these conundrums are at a high level. How balancing in regulatory practice functions with constitutionally assured freedoms should be known in a way that informs policies toward democratic engagements and secures user rights on digital platforms.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

As one of the widely recognised rights, freedom of expression has emerged as a topic of excessive debate on a global scale. The right to express one's opinion and the freedom to seek out, collect, and disseminate information and thoughts without limitation were all described through Article 19 of the United Nations in 1948. With the improvement of social media, freedom of expression has become a cornerstone, and the arena has visible a widespread upward push inside the number of users, particularly people who express their proper freedom of expression via social media. According to current statistics, there had been over 4.26 billion social media users by the year 2021, and that number is projected to grow to nearly 6 billion by 2027 (Smith, 2021).

The issue of freedom of expression and social media censorship is a complex problem that has gained massive attention in recent years. While social media platforms can promote freedom of expression, censorship can restrict the variety of opinions and views shared on those platforms. At the same time, the absence of censorship can lead to the unfolding of hate speech, fake news, and different harmful content material. The hassle is similarly complicated because social media organizations have control over what content material is visible and shared on their platforms (Kiezman et al., 2021).

While those companies must promote speech and protect users' rights to freedom of expression, they need to observe government policies and keep away from legal liabilities. The interpretation and enforcement of legal guidelines related to hate speech, defamation, and country-wide safety can also vary across one country and another. In comparison with the past, while gatekeepers managed and negotiated peoples' right of entry to numerous mass media platforms, social media platforms have transformed human capability to interact throughout geographical and political boundaries with speed and easily (Appel et al., 2020).

The right to freedom of expression, which has been enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is becoming increasingly regular worldwide. According to Article 19 of the United Nations (1948), everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, which incorporates the freedom to express opinions without interference in addition to the liberty to look for out, collect, and disseminate information or ideas through any media, regardless of barriers. Freedom of expression and social media censorship are critical for improving democracy so they should co-exist.

At the same time, social media have also been credited with enhancing freedom of expression, especially for marginalised voices and groups. Social media platforms have supplied areas for people to share their reports and views, hook up with others who share comparable pastimes, and interact in democratic discourse. Social media use affects each social and cultural lifestyle. This is possible due to the widespread use of mobile phone networks, including in rural areas of Africa, making it simple for people to access social media from their cell phones (Piccalilli & Atabek 2012).

Media have significantly prompted by way of the improvement of cellular and web-primarily based technologies, leading to excessive-interplay platforms whereby people and groups can proportion, talk, and regulate user-generated content material, together with freedom of expression (Kiezman et al., 2021). Tanzania is one of the African nations that have witnessed an increase in social media usage, which is being motivated with the aid of the rapid expansion of the communications sector.

According to TCRA data, until September 2022, Tanzania had nearly 58.1 million active SIM cards actively used for communication (TCRA, 2022). Internet usage in Tanzania has increased from 29,169,958 users in June 2022 to 31,122,163 users in September 2022, an increase of 60.7 percent, with an annual growth rate of about 17 percent. Facebook remains the most popular social media platform in Tanzania followed by YouTube and WhatsApp in third place (TCRA, 2022). Other platforms include Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, Netflix, Bit Torrent, File transfer, Google Play, and Telegram.

The use of social media is growing along with democracy. Since individuals and communities can now create and share their content with less concern from the government than in the past, public relations no longer have the power to set the agenda.
The government must now decide whether to take social media seriously, engage in this communication, or ignore it. Both have a significant impact (Kiezman et al., 2021).

According to MCT (2022)**,** even though the Tanzanian Constitution guarantees the right to free speech through Article 18 of its Constitution, the government has recently passed controversial laws that restrict people from expressing their views. According to the Human Rights Report (2021), the Tanzania government has imposed restrictions on Internet use on websites and online traffic by implementing surveillance.

MCT (2022) Content that causes outrage and is considered offensive or morally inappropriate is prohibited. Violating this rule can bring about a heavy great or at least 12 months imprisonment. The law also criminalises the dissemination of false information, defined as the transmission of information, data, or facts in the form of a computer system that is fraudulent, misleading, or untrue constitutes a crime. Individuals face public threats for expressing extremist information or views, even the real ones. About this, users of social media frequently experience threats, intimidation, assaults, kidnapping, media property destruction, vandalism, and arson. Many media and social media users have acquired fines, prison sentences, suspensions, or bans for what many trust to be the legitimate workout of their rights to free speech and expression

Given the complex relationship between freedom of expression and social media censorship, there is a need for continued studies and evaluation on this topic. Understanding the balance between the regulation of social media in Tanzania and the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech and expression can assist in developing policies and practices that will promote freedom of speech and democratic engagement on those platforms.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
The problem of Freedom of expression on the one hand and social media censorship on the other side has emerged as a considerable subject matter for discussion. In the past few years ago, social media in Tanzania has changed plenty. Online spaces are becoming important for talking, expressing thoughts, and being part of the community as is being guaranteed by Article 18 of the Tanzania Constitution.
Tanzania's government is more involved in controlling what people share online. The government's increasing control over online platforms raises questions about the impact on the ability of social media users to freely express their thoughts, and opinions, and engage in open discourse. Recently, Tanzania has introduced several media bills that caused individual press freedom violations to worsen. Users of social media frequently experience threats, fines, intimidation, assaults, kidnapping, and media property destruction, vandalism, and arson (MCT, 2020).
Many social media users have received fines, jail sentences, suspensions, or bans for what many consider to be the legitimate exercising of their rights to free speech and expression. For example, in 2016, Tanzania noticed many of these punitive measures, which are in opposition to Article 18 of the United Republic of Tanzania's 1977 constitution, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression and speech (MCT, 2020).

Furthermore, the rise of social media censorship instances in Tanzania has also raised concerns about these platforms' impact on the excellence of public discourse and democratic engagement. The issue of social media censorship and freedom of expression is multifaceted and calls for similar studies and evaluation. Understanding the assessment of the impact of censorship on social media users' freedom of expression in Tanzania can assist in informing regulations and practices that promote responsible and ethical use of social media without cost speech and democratic discourse. Therefore, this study seeks to study social media censorship and the freedom of expression of social media users in Tanzania.

THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW
The study had to review other authors' works, starting with a theoretical framework followed by reviews from other authors'' works as a strategy to know what has been covered and observe the gap in between. This study used two theories, the Freedom of expression theory and the gate-keeping theory, to support the censorship of social media users' freedom of expression in Tanzania.

The theory of freedom of expression, which emphasises the proper freedom of opinions and thoughts without fear of censorship, has been championed by numerous influential figures. However, one of the key proponents of this theory is John Milton. John Milton, an English poet and intellectual, is famed for his defence of freedom of speech in his seminal work "Areopagitica," published in 1644. In this work, Milton argued passionately in opposition to censorship and wanted unbridled expression of ideas, laying the groundwork for the cutting-edge know-how of freedom of expression. His advocacy for the loose trade of thoughts and information has had an enduring effect on improving this essential right.

In the context of the social media censorship on users' freedom of expression in Tanzania, the freedom of expression concept is rather relevant. It is used as a foundational guideline to assess how barriers to freedom of speech, imposed via censorship legal guidelines, and regulations, prevent individuals' potential to express themselves openly via social media platforms. By examining the implications of these restrictions on access to information, media viability, public discourse, and trust in government institutions, the study has drawn upon the freedom of expression to highlight the importance of protecting and upholding this fundamental right.

Gatekeeping Theory was first introduced by Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist, during the early 1940s. The communication theory focuses on regulating and selecting information disseminated through various media channels to understand how gatekeepers control it individually or corporately. In particular, this concept emphasises the role of individuals known as "gatekeepers" who determine what content is appropriate for public consumption while excluding other materials.

Editors, Journalists, and social media content moderators along with online platform algorithms operate these gates that are responsible for making such choices related to selection/coverage criteria influenced by factors like news values and editorial guidelines aligned with corporate interests and societal norms thoroughly analyzed in Gatekeeping Theory's framework.

This theory further helped in interpret censorship issues concerning free speech limitations set up under certain regimes globally; and supervise expressed viewpoints available publicly via regulations imposed locally or regionally thanks largely due built-up expertise over time from examining impacts exerted upon mediums controlled/influenced primarily through conventional means (i.e., print).

Furthermore, the theory was relevant to the study since it indicated the position of the regulatory authorities in restricting unwanted content from penetrating the public. This is similar to social media censorship, which is aimed at ensuring that social media users comply with provided laws and policies to avoid any violation in case of sharing unwanted information with the public.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of social media censorship and freedom of expression has gained worldwide attention, and scholars are looking to study it from different perspectives. Some students argue that social media can be essential in selling loose speech and facilitating democratic engagement (Castells, 2015; Howard, 2010). However, others suggest that the upward thrust of social media has led to the unfolding of disinformation and propaganda, that could undermine democratic institutions (Kshetri, 2018; Sunstein,2017).

In the study by Demuyakor and Doe (2021), the transformative impact of social media on democratic practices in Ghana is highlighted, aligning with McSherry's emphasis on effective content moderation (2019). Recognising concerns about privacy infringement, the study underscores the necessity for responsible content management on social media platforms. To preserve democratic values, the proposal of a "Social Media Council" is advocated, emphasizing collaboration among governments, social media firms, and civil bodies. The study calls for re-evaluating national policies and legal frameworks to accommodate digital realities without compromising fundamental freedoms. (Al-Hussein, 2020).

Similarly, in examining censorship on Chinese social media, the study conducted interviews with users and utilized secondary data from a Harvard social media study. The analysis applies Habermas' public sphere theory to understand the implications of censorship on freedom of expression in China. The study reveals the complexity of testing public sphere conditions in the context of censorship, highlighting discrepancies between Habermas' conditions and the authoritarian control in China.

The Chinese case presents challenges in applying the conditions of inclusivity, common concern, and disregard of status to social media censorship. Despite limited freedom of expression, social media discussions in China primarily focus on private matters rather than politics or government criticism. The study underscores the importance of understanding the hierarchical control implemented by Chinese authorities, suggesting the limited relevance of public sphere conditions to social media censorship in an authoritarian state.

Power (2016) also explores social media censorship in China, utilizing interviews and secondary data analysis. The study reveals the complexities of applying Habermas' public sphere theory to Chinese social media censorship, emphasizing challenges in reconciling the theory with the authoritarian control exerted by the government. The analysis provides valuable perspectives on the relationship between social media censorship and the public sphere, calling for further examination if the Chinese government eases its censorship.

In contrast, Vareba et al. (2017) discuss Internet censorship in Nigeria, framing it as a tool for political intimidation. The study highlights the undemocratic provisions within the country's Cybercrime laws and actions against bloggers, contributing to a poor international rating regarding press and Internet freedom. The literature suggests the urgent need for human rights and political activism to pressure policymakers into amending legislation, fostering a more democratic online environment.

However, these studies collectively underscore the nuanced dynamics of social media, censorship, and democracy. While the Ghanaian case advocates for collaborative efforts and responsible content management, the Chinese and Nigerian contexts reveal challenges in applying established theoretical frameworks due to authoritarian controls and political motivations. The studies emphasize the need for ongoing research to adapt theoretical models to evolving digital landscapes.

In contrast, Pauline and Michelsen's (2023) research explores the relationship between age, social media shutdowns, and the use of social media for news in Africa. The study suggests that citizens, particularly older individuals, tend to rely more on social media for news in countries with social media shutdowns. However, the methodology used does not establish causation, prompting a call for additional research, including in-depth case studies. The study highlights the broader relationship between a country's online control strategies and citizens' online behavior, proposing that overt controls may lead to a backlash, with citizens turning to social media for information.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This conceptual framework representation not only serves to orient the reader but also underscores the complexity of the interconnections that define this research landscape. It establishes a foundation for the subsequent exploration into the nuanced dynamics between regulatory authorities, individual responses, and the broader implications for online communication and expression.
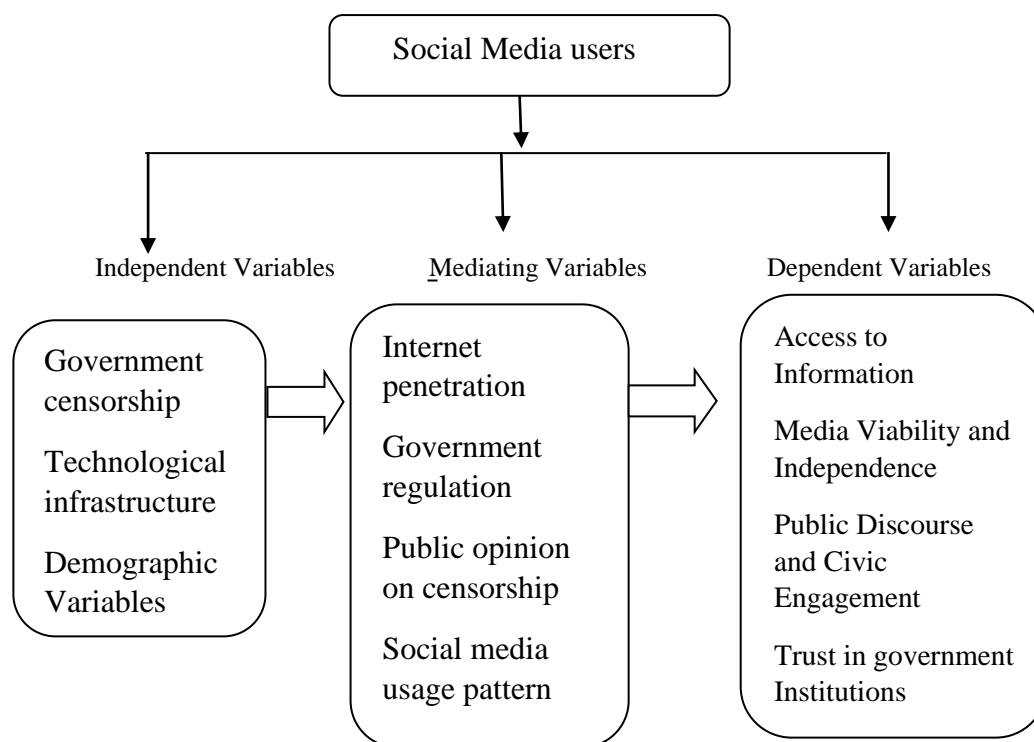
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

In summary, the studies on the effect of censorship on social media customers' freedom of expression in Tanzania, focusing on Ilala District, Dar es Salaam, need to know the relationships between independent, dependent, and mediating variables. The censorship regulations imposed by the Tanzanian government, technological infrastructure, and demographic variables work as independent variables, influencing various dependent variables of freedom of expression like media viability, public discourse, civic engagement, and trust in government institutions.

Mediating variables, which include internet penetration, government regulation, public opinion on censorship, social media usage patterns, and public discourse dynamics, play a crucial role in explaining how censorship influences social media users in Tanzania. By analysing these interconnections, researchers will gain insights into the complicated dynamics of censorship's impact on online expression and its broader implications for media freedom, records access, and public trust within the Tanzanian context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach was adopted for this study on social media censorship on the freedom of expression among users in Ilala District, Dar es Salaam. This design has been adopted because it offers an in-depth understanding through the combination of quantitative data with qualitative insights. The quantitative component provided measurable evidence of the extent and impact of censorship, while from a qualitative side, it gave deeper insights into users' personal experiences and their respective coping mechanisms.

In this study, an explanatory research design was used because social media censorship is a relatively new area where little prior research has been found. This design helped in drawing out underlying reasons for the users' behavior under censorship, thus laying a foundation for further studies on the topic. By adopting this approach, the research did not aim at arriving at definite answers but an enhanced comprehension of how censorship affects online freedom of expression. The population for this study focused on 60 social media users in Ilala District due to the recent rapid growth in the use of the internet and social media use among the locality (TCRA, 2022). A Simple random sampling technique was used to select samples from the population; where by the sample size was 60 respondents. The sample size was determined by simple random sampling, whereby every individual had an equal chance of being selected hence increasing data representation (Rwegoshora, 2006). The sample size for this study was simple random sampling whereby everyone had a chance to be selected using the Rule of Thumb formula which states: ($N \geq 50+8M$) Whereby N = sample size, M = number of study independent variables (Stott, 1986).

Data collection involved the use of structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data on the frequency and types of censorship users had experienced, and awareness of related regulations were easy to collect using questionnaires. It also made it easy to conduct a statistical analysis of the trends and patterns in users' experiences. On the other hand, qualitative data as in-depth narratives describing how users see censorship affecting freedom of expression, and the many strategies used by users to work around such limitations were acquired through interviews with selected users and relevant stakeholders. The mixed-method approach allowed deeper subtlety of the issue.

Quantitative data analysis was done through the use of IBM SPSS, 2019 version, which enabled the computation of frequencies and percentages among other measures of statistics; this was further presented in tabular form, graphs, and charts to facilitate easy interpretation.

Qualitative data analysis was thematic to identify patterns and key insights that complement the quantitative findings. In this way, merging both data types gives a full view of how social media censorship shapes the behaviors of its users in awareness of the mechanisms of censorship and what it means in terms of freedom of expression.

RESEARCH FINDINGS
The presentation of findings of this study was supported by answered questionnaires from among respondents, who were 60 social media users. Therefore, this part will provide information to explain the data which were presented in tables, charts, graphs, and explanations.
Level of awareness regarding social media censorship among social media users in Ilala District
Results show that a vast majority of the respondents are aware of social media censorship. The specific values include 31.7% being somewhat familiar and 28.3% who answered very familiar, amounting to nearly 60% for those highly informed about social media censorship. Additionally, 30% had some level of familiarity with the subject, meaning a fair proportion who had basic knowledge. Only 10% said they were unfamiliar with the concept of social media censorship; that means 90% of the responders have some degree of knowledge about the subject. This datum supports real recognition by the responders of social media censorship, showing a prevalent awareness of the term.
The findings on the awareness of social media censorship show that 90% of the respondents have some knowledge about it. This high level of awareness is consistent with several studies in the literature. Pew Research Center (2021) also found high levels of awareness among American social media users about platform censorship. This proves widespread recognition of the same issue in different regions.
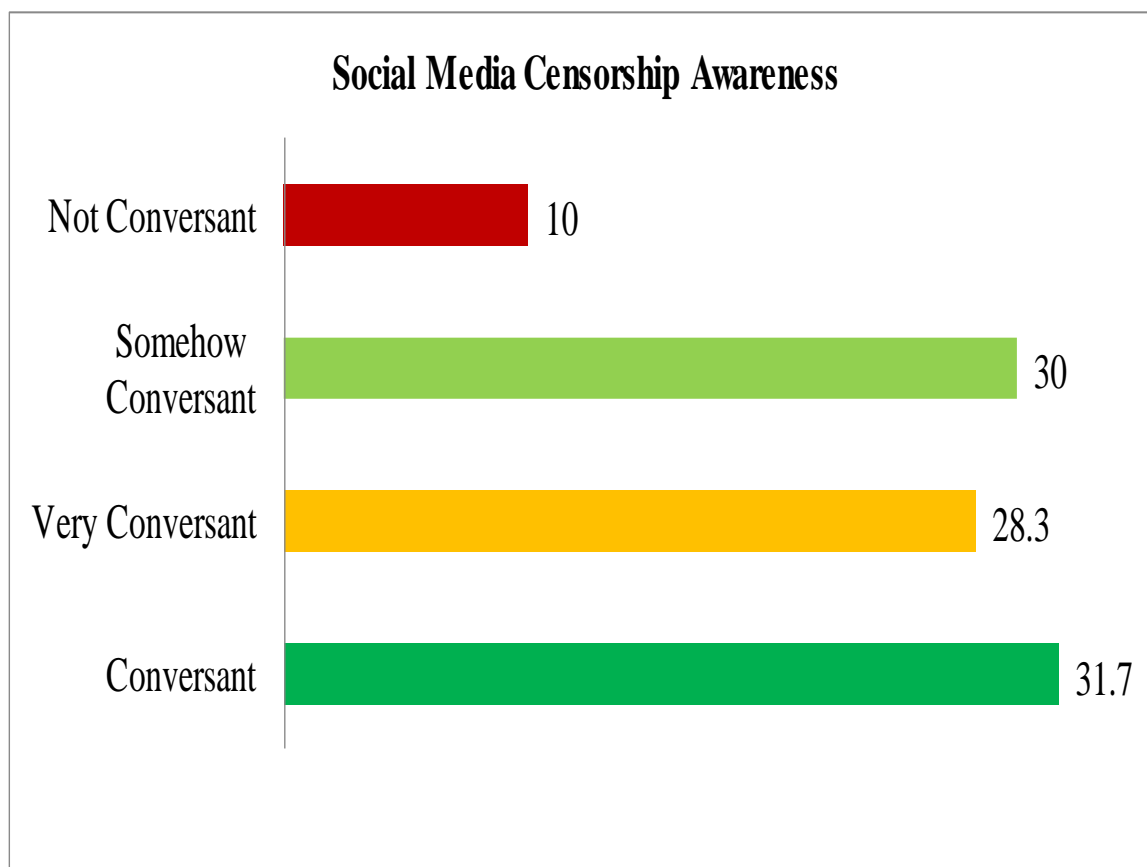

Figure 2: Source Research Findings (2024)

The Pew Research study, however, emphasizes that this awareness differs based on key demographic factors. In contrast, the present study takes a highly generalized view of awareness and does not delve into demographic differences. As such, while high awareness about social media censorship exists, its variation across different demographic groups may not be fully explored.

In contrast, research by the Centre for International Governance Innovation (2020) confirms the same: wide usage of knowledge on censorship practices among Internet users. The redundancy underlines a fact of prevalent awareness but refers to possible regional and demographic variations, which would interact with the depth of understanding. This variable aspect then adds greater complexity that is not addressed in this research; hence, the general awareness may be high, but the specifics of how this may vary in a context need more exploration.

Conversely, Smith and Johnson (2022) focus on demographic groups' emotional and reform-oriented responses, such as the case of Black males aged 25-34. Their research finds that the issue is not only very well-known but also associated with a strong feeling of victimization and the need for changes in censorship policies.

This adds a further dimension to the user experience and activism, which is different from the current study, pointing out that demographic-driven awareness of censorship goes with demand and concern for reform in varying degrees.

Anderson's research (2019) remarked that a lack of awareness about the laws regulating social media allows users to act against the law without knowing it, resulting in their increasing vulnerability to censorship and punitive measures. The findings also revealed that of those who knew the censorship laws, many normally perceived them as restrictive and probably limiting their freedom of speech. This perception resonates with the raising of concerns.

Perceptions of social media users regarding social media censorship laws
In the study of the social media censorship on freedom of expression, respondents were asked to choose their level of agreement with the statement concerning their perception of social media censorship should it impede freedom if they had to express themselves. The choices ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".
Results show that 23 respondents, which account for 38.3%, disagree that through social media censorship, the right to freedom of expression is indeed hampered. This would therefore imply that to this group of people, censorship on social media really restricts them from exercising their right to free self-expression and expression of opinion.

Further, 19 (31.7%) agreed to the statement. Adding this to the strongly agreed, it means that a majority of 43.4% of the respondents consider social media censorship as an infringement of their freedom of expression.

Contrasting this, 23 respondents said, "No, censorship does not inhibit the right to freedom of expression." This group believes that censorship is necessary for civility to be maintained on the internet and does not impede a person from self-expression. Another similar number, 7 (11.7%) said, "Strongly disagreed.".
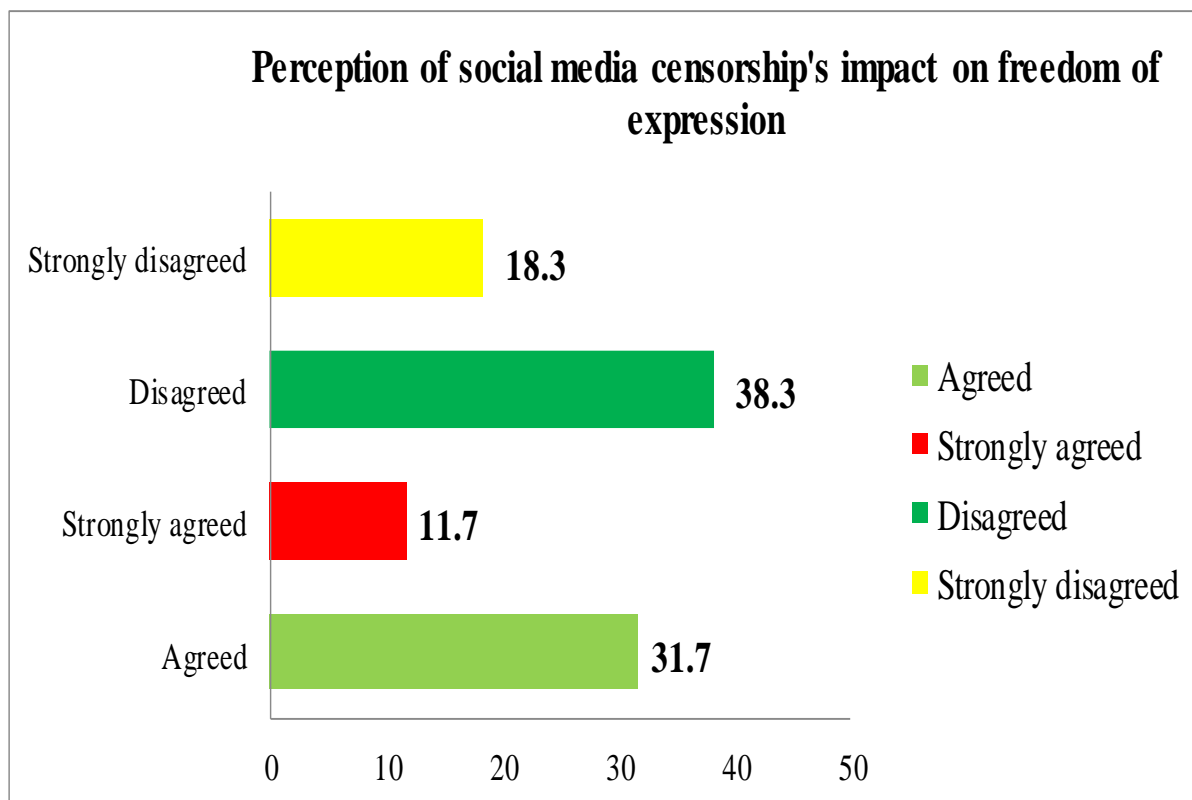

Figure 3: Source: Research Findings (2024)

These results align with other research on the complex and controversial nature of regulating social media content. Akdeniz (2019) study examined Internet censorship across France, Turkey, and Iran, identifying five key factors driving censorship: ruling system, institutional set-up, national identity, technical ability, and political opportunity (Akdeniz, 2019). The divided perceptions observed in this study reflect the ongoing debate around balancing free expression with the need for content moderation.

The findings from this study highlight the diverse experiences and perspectives users have regarding the impact of social media censorship on their online interactions and expressions (Muganda, 2020). Other research has similarly found that perceptions of social media censorship are divided, with a majority seeing it as important for maintaining order but a sizable minority viewing it as a violation of free speech (Akdeniz, 2019). The complexity of balancing these competing priorities is a consistent theme across the research.

Pew Research Center survey (2020) found that 73% of Americans believe it at least somewhat likely that social media sites "intentionally censor political views that they find objectionable," with much greater belief among Republicans than other identified groups. This suggests a general feeling that some sort of censorship on social media is necessary and happening, though the exact percentages vary between the studies.

Coping mechanisms for social media users in Ilala District to mitigate social Media censorship.
The findings indicate various strategies employed by respondents to address social media censorship. A significant majority, comprising 53.3% of the participants (32 individuals), identified self-censorship as their primary approach.
This high percentage suggests that many users deliberately avoid posting or expressing certain opinions to prevent monitoring or potential repercussions such as post removal or account suspension. This reflects a perceived need for self-regulation in response to the challenges of censorship.
In contrast, a smaller portion of respondents, 5% (3 individuals), reported using encrypted communication or other forms of media to evade surveillance. This indicates that some users turn to secure communication channels to protect their freedom of expression and bypass censorship policies imposed by major social media platforms.

The results show different measures that respondents take to handle censorship on social media. A majority of 53.3% of the respondents singled out self-censorship as their best strategy, amounting to 32 of the participants. The high percentage reveals that on a number of instances, users would not post or express opinions because of a fear of being monitored or their posts being taken down or the account suspended. This reflects a perceived need for self-regulation in response to the challenges of censorship.

By contrast, a smaller portion of the participants reported using encrypted communication media to avoid surveillance at 5%, or three of the participants. This would show that users change to secure means of communication to keep their freedom of expression and work around the censorship policies enacted by major social media platforms.

Additionally, 8.3% of the respondents identified themselves as advocates in fighting against censorship. These users are those active ones that promote freedom of expression by simply raising awareness, creating online activism, or even lobbying for policy reforms. They believe in the struggle that they will create an open and transparent arena in the virtual world.

Accordingly, 10% of the overall respondents indicated seeking alternative sources of information as a means of reducing the effects of censorship. This approach will include searching for other avenues, such as independent media and other decentralized networks, to ensure access to uncensored content and diverse perspectives. The coping strategies identified in this present research, including self-censorship, encrypted channels of communication, advocacy, and information-seeking alternatives, are also buttressed by findings from another research work.

For instance, one study by the Oxford Internet Institute reported self-censorship as "a universal tactic of internet users in restrictive environments, who simply refrain from discussing sensitive topics that might put them at risk". The same pattern of behaviour observed among current respondents also tends to agree. This is also echoed by The Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society (2020) in its recommendation of making encrypted communication channels a default procedure for those that want to retain their privacy and therefore avoid censorship. This agrees with the findings of this study, where some respondents were found to use encrypted media to evade censorship.

Moreover, the Freedom on the Net report by Freedom House (2022) elaborates on how digital activism plays its role, yet also explains the various functions of media channels in access to diverse viewpoints within highly restrictive contexts. This corroborates the findings of the study in respect to advocacy and alternative sources being effective strategies for navigating online censorship.

These are further reinforced by the work of Hu and Barradas (2023), who conducted research on self-censorship practices over social media in North America. They found that people self-censored to avoid social reprisals or ostracism, which could be seen as very similar to the reasons of the majority of respondents in the current study to avoid monitoring. Furthermore, Hu and Barradas discussed demographic and psychometric variables related to differences in self-censorship practices, adding more texture to the ways in which users negotiate pressures for censorship.

It also agreed with what Mason and Krieger, in their 2020 report, did find to an increasing trend in the use of encrypted messaging applications among users themselves as part of circumvention methods. The studies complement each other by noting such a trend. However, Mason and Krieger might have framed this result with a discussion of Tanzanian users' coping strategies vis-à-vis the local censorship legislation while focusing on the more general implications of the encryption technology for user behavior.

While both studies accepted advocacy as one of the coping mechanisms, they did so in different contexts: this research reflects advocacy efforts within a more restricted environment with limited space for such activities, while Suzuki's research has dealt with democratic societies where such advocacy is more frequent yet has huge obstacles. This contrast shows how efficient advocacy might be within different political and regulatory contexts.

By putting these studies together, one sees a multi-dimensional approach to coping with, and challenging, social media censorship in the various strategies that users deploy. These strategies of self-censorship, encrypted communication, and advocacy and seeking alternative information reflect a highly complex landscape of user responses toward various censorship pressures.

Moreover, Freedom House's Freedom on the Net report (2022) elaborates on the role of digital activism and the diverse functions of media channels in providing access to varied viewpoints within restrictive contexts. This corroborates the study's findings on advocacy and alternative information sources as effective strategies for navigating online censorship.

Hu and Barradas (2023) further reinforce these findings with their research on social media self-censorship in North America. Their study revealed that users often self-censor to avoid social backlash or ostracism, which aligns with most respondents in the current study who engage in self-censorship to avoid monitoring.

Additionally, Hu and Barradas discuss the influence of demographic and psychometric factors on self-censorship behaviours, adding depth to the understanding of how users manage censorship pressures.

The observation is consistent with Mason and Krieger's (2020) findings, wherein it was reported that the use of encrypted messaging apps will rise among users as part of tactics to bypass censorship.

The studies run parallel in noting this trend. However, Mason and Krieger might have focused on the more general implications of the encryption technology on user behavior while placing this finding in the context of Tanzanian users' strategies for coping with the local censorship law.

While both studies accepted advocacy as one of the coping mechanisms, they did it in different contexts. This research reflects advocacy efforts within a more restricted environment, with limited space for such activities, compared to Suzuki's research on democratic societies, where advocacy is more frequent but has huge obstacles. This contrast shows how efficient advocacy might be in different political and regulatory contexts.

Overall, aligning these studies underscores the multi-dimensional strategies users employ to cope with and challenge social media censorship. These strategies, including self-censorship, encrypted communication, advocacy, and seeking alternative information, reflect a complex landscape of user responses to censorship pressures across various contexts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has surfaced varied experiences and complex awareness about social media censorship among users in Ilala District, Tanzania. The range of views runs from the imposition of censorship as a much-needed tool to regulate harm in content to the status of a great blockade to free expression. Various ways through which users cope with these restrictions involve practicing self-censorship, encrypted communication, advocacy, and alternative information channels, thus showing resilience and adaptability.

Therefore, these can easily be overridden through public awareness programs on social media censorship and a user's rights, hence further facilitating an understanding of legal frameworks and implications. The lawmakers should bring forth balanced regulations that protect free expression while putting in place an effective mechanism of management of harmful content with no overreach or unfairness.

Digital literacy programs could empower users through secure communication competencies and tools that would help them become resilient to any form of censorship. Community-based advisory boards or forums will better avail opportunities for users to express their views and contribute to policy formulation in support of less restrictive and more user-friendly methods of censorship. Besides, accountability and transparency are paramount in those definite rules of moderation, including channels for appeal and complaint procedures, which are established to be fair and understandable in censorship policies.

This would, through regular monitoring and evaluation of the impact of censorship on free speech, enable necessary adjustments to prevent overreach and allow for a more balanced and transparent approach to managing social media censorship regarding the protection of freedom of expression.

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