

Perceptions on the Performance of Media against Corruption in Tanzania: A survey of Ubungo Municipality residents in Dar es Salaam

Abstract

The media play significant roles as a vigilant guardian of the public interest and as an influential pillar of society, encompassing the responsibility of actively opposing and unequivocally condemning acts of corruption. The extent to which the media provides coverage of a particular subject might impact individuals' perception of its significance or insignificance. This paper presents part of the findings of the research titled *Perceptions on the Performance of Media against Corruption in Tanzania: A survey of Ubungo Municipality residents in Dar es Salaam*. The study was guided by social responsibility theory and meaning and construction theory. The study relied on a total of 110 respondents. These comprised 100 randomly sampled Ubungo residents and 10 key informants who were purposively selected from the media profession and comprised senior public relations experts. Data captured through the questionnaire were analysed using the SPSS package, whereby results were presented in frequencies and percentages and illustrated in graphs, while qualitative data were analysed using content analysis and presented using verbatim statements and reported speech. The study found that the majority of the surveyed Ubungo residents do not consider the media in Tanzania to play a role in exposing corrupt practices in the country. The study further found that laxity and complicity of corruption news complicate effective corruption reporting, hence undermining the role of the media in the war against corruption. This paper recommends that more studies be carried out on the area that has not been adequately researched and holds the potential to improve the role of the media in the fight against corruption.

Keywords: *Perceptions, Anti-Corruption, Media Content, Residents, Tanzania*

1. Introduction

Corruption is one of the biggest issues the developing world is currently facing. While it has warped almost all human cultures throughout history in one way or another, its effects have not been the same on all of them. Because corruption is difficult to identify and measure, empirical testing is highly challenging for academics who research it in an effort to develop strategies to reduce it. According to Skjerdal (2018), the media acts as society's watchdog, shielding the populace from the excesses of the ruling elite. One of the main problems the developing world is currently dealing with is corruption. According to Helman (2013), the institution's guiding principles are where the concept of corruption originates and is rooted. Corruption, in the opinion of Helman (2013), is the use of a public office or position for personal gain. Three elements must be present simultaneously for corruption to take place: a strong individual with discretionary power, an economic rent associated with that position, and a low likelihood of being

exposed by the legal system (Jain, 2001). The causes of corruption are brilliantly explained by Klitgaard (1998), who contends that monopolistic power, discretion, and accountability interact to produce corruption. Little to no accountability systems, as well as imperfectly competitive marketplaces and options, cannot exist without them.

Since 1995, Transparency International (TI) has compiled an annual Corruption Perceptions Index based on surveys of businesspeople to determine the extent of corruption. Similarly, over a long period, the World Bank has acquired a range of data on corruption, including a survey of 100,000 businesses and a collection of governance and institutional quality indicators. The facts brought the topic to the forefront of the discussion around development (Kaufmann et al., 2007).

The media play important duties as the public's watchdog and the fourth estate of the realm, which include opposing and not tolerating corruption. This is wellknown and may even be universally acknowledged. According to Musa (1996), the frequency with which the media covers an issue can influence how important or unimportant people see it. The media's responsibility is to provide citizens with sufficient, high-quality information so they can make informed decisions when exercising their rights, which is why the press is known as society's watchdog. According to Lessmann and Gunther (2010), the media can be crucial in exposing corruption and launching political, judicial, and criminal sanctions against it. Depending on the many levels at which they act, the audiences they target, and the larger media ecosystem on which they rely, various media genres reveal their strengths and demonstrate their limitations as anti-corruption instruments.

Public confidence in the media's ability to serve as a watchdog, set agendas, and engage the public in socially responsible activities through educating, entertaining, and enlightening them about issues of general interest. Africans have given mixed media reviews, with some praising them for their efforts to combat corruption (UNODC, 2020) and others accusing them of being corrupt themselves (Musa, 1996).

By avoiding and covering wrongdoing, the media is anticipated to play a vital role in the battle against corruption. In Tanzania, 3,911 cases containing corruption allegations were reported in a single year, 2015–16, according to recent evidence (Xinhua, 2017). This situation calls into question the media's contribution to Tanzania's fight against corruption. In light of this, the purpose of this study is to examine public perceptions of the effectiveness of Tanzanian media in combating corruption by employing a sample of inhabitants from Ubongo Municipality.

2. Literature Review

Maier and Lamargot (2023) looked at how a corporate corruption scandal was framed by the media over time. The study, which is based on content analysis, focuses on the development of media frames used by the English and French Press in their reporting of the corruption crisis involving SNC-Lavalin, a global

engineering company with headquarters in Quebec. The study shows how, when the company's legal predicament became politicized, media coverage changed from fair and nuanced reporting of a complex phenomenon that enabled discussions about the proper repercussions of corruption to a selective (re)construction of events to support party agendas. By demonstrating how the politicization of a corporate corruption case resulted in a split in public opinion among the English and French Press, the study adds to the body of knowledge on how the media frame corporate corruption.

Hamid and Ramdani (2020) investigated the problems associated with disclosing financial misconduct as well as potential solutions. Using a qualitative methodology, twenty in-depth interviews with journalists and editors from government and private media in Sudan were conducted. The analytic procedure was streamlined by the use of NVivo 8 software, which was also utilized to examine the collected data thematically to better understand the issue. To solve the challenges of covering financial corruption in Sudan, the study proposes five key recommendations: integrating media institutions; press freedom; sufficient training; use of digital technology; and cooperation among journalists.

Blanc et al. (2017) looked at the issue of whether varying degrees of media coverage of corporate corruption tend to alter corporations' anti-corruption disclosures. The authors also examined several ways in which press freedom in the nations where firms are based affects disclosure and the outcomes of media exposure. The authors employ media exposure measurements based on a search of the Dow Jones Factiva database, Reporters without Borders assessments of press freedom, and 2012 Transparency International ratings of the 105 top multinational firms' anti-corruption disclosure. Regression analysis is used by the authors to evaluate relationships while adjusting for additional firm-specific characteristics that could influence disclosure decisions. The authors then take into account the potential impact of additional country-level factors. The findings show that variations in sample companies' anti-corruption disclosures are positively correlated with media exposure, using either existence or an extensiveness metric. Additionally, the authors discover that disclosure is greater (lesser) or less extensive depending on how free the press is in the home nation and that lessening press freedom seems to lessen the effect of media coverage on disclosure. The authors go on to show that press freedom levels account for a greater variation in anticorruption disclosures than other country-level variables that might affect the practice.

Budima (2016) investigated the role that corruption plays in the development of emerging nations as the oldest and most prevalent form of economic crime. The purpose of the article was to explain why developing nations are more open to illicit investment and corrupt practices. The paper aims to provide an answer to

the question of whether transitional regimes and developing societies can manage such criminal activity. Research is supported by pertinent literature and empirical data, and it takes a multitheoretical approach to the problem. The study examines the two sides of corruption, which include nations and dysfunctional governments. It talks about how corruption over time threatens the growth of less developed states. Corruption is an international crime, not a regional one. Only the state can regulate it domestically, and only with the help of the public and the media. With international collaboration and the execution of bilateral regulations, it can be managed internationally. The study's conclusion stresses the need for international cooperation in preventing economic crimes with victims in poor nations.

Spence (2020) looked at Facebook's professional role in terms of its information/communication practices before arguing that it is a media corporation and not just a "platform," making it subject to the same normative obligations as other media organizations. The paper demonstrates how Facebook's role of mediating and curating the information of its users places upon it a normative editing responsibility to ensure both the preventive detection and corrective editing of fake news, as well as other forms of misinformation distributed on Facebook, by applying dual obligation information theory (DOIT), a normative information and communication theory that applies generally to all media companies that disseminate and share information. This study employs two theories, social responsibility theory and meaning construction theory, to see how media and journalists are fair in reporting anti-corruption stories.

Social reasonability theory places an ethical and professional duty on journalists to play a part in their society and a greater duty to report corruption cases ethically and professionally. The foundation of social responsibility theory is an ethical framework that requires decisions and acts to be ethically justified before being taken (McQuail, 1987). It would be regarded as socially irresponsible if the activity or choice harms society or the environment. Moral values that are inherent in society create a distinction between right and wrong. In this way, journalists ought to use their training to do their share of the job by reporting these corrupt practices professionally and ethically.

Another theory that guided the study is the meaning and construction theory. This theory contends that human behavior is a result of our inner perceptions (Alesandrini& Larson, 2002). This comprehension is developed based on how a person assigns meanings to symbols, images, or events they see in the media, and this can only occur when their society assigns common interpretations to the media content in question (Cakir, 2008). Our meanings are shaped, changed, and sustained by participation in a range of communication processes. This theory is relevant to this paper because some corruption practices are viewed as normal by the media and are no longer reported. For

instance, the media know that traffic police officers often solicit bribes on the roads, yet such incidences are rarely reported because they have been constructed by the media to be normal.

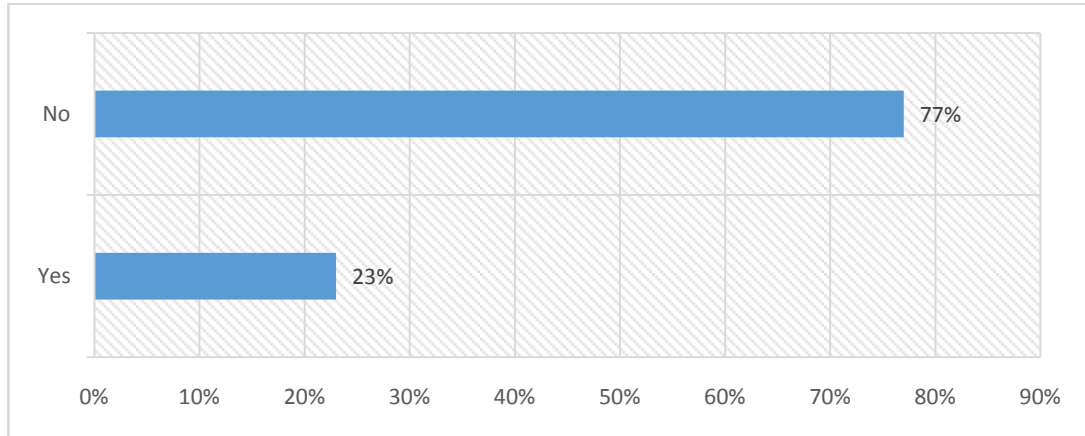
3. Methodology

For the methodological part, the study was based on a survey design, whereby the study was informed by a total of 110 respondents. These comprised 100 randomly sampled Ubungu residents and 10 key informants who were purposively selected from the media sector and comprised senior public relations experts. The study administered a questionnaire to the 100 respondents, while key informant guides for the media experts, complemented by a rigorous review of documents, were used. Data captured through the questionnaire were analysed using the SPSS package and presented in frequencies and percentages and illustrated using graphs, while qualitative data were analysed using content analysis and presented using verbatim statements and reported speech.

4. Result

The study reported that the majority of the respondents (77%) of the surveyed Ubungu residents indicated that they did not consider the media in Tanzania as playing a role in exposing corrupt practices in the country, with only a small percentage (23%) answering in the affirmative. This view was also highlighted during the administration of the key informant interviews, which showed that the media in Tanzania still has a long way to go in ensuring that corruption is reported effectively. (See figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Whether Media in Tanzania Performs



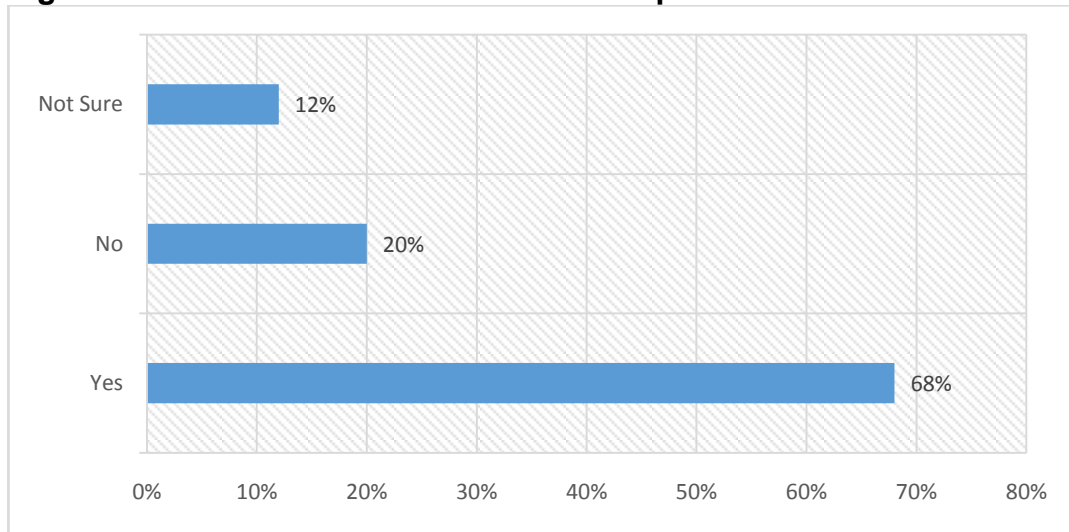
Source: Research Findings (2023)

During key informant interviews, it was indicated that corruption has become so pervasive that even some journalists themselves involve themselves in corrupt practices. The informants wondered how the journalists were likely to effectively report corruption cases when they (journalists) were not clean, as some journalists reportedly take bribes when they are supposed to play the watchdog role.

“The war on corruption is still a long journey because there have been reports of some journalists taking bribes or some gifts (in brown envelopes), which compromises their capacity to cover corruption-rated cases professionally.” Key Informant Interview, Dar es Salaam, **3rd May 2023.**

Regarding the relevance of education to anti-corruption initiatives by the media, the majority (68%) of the respondents pointed out that education on anti-corruption by the media was important, while 20% pointed out that it was not relevant. Twelve percent of the respondents were not sure that education on anti-corruption by the media was important. This implies that many people in the country still need more awareness of the various forms of corruption and how to avoid it.

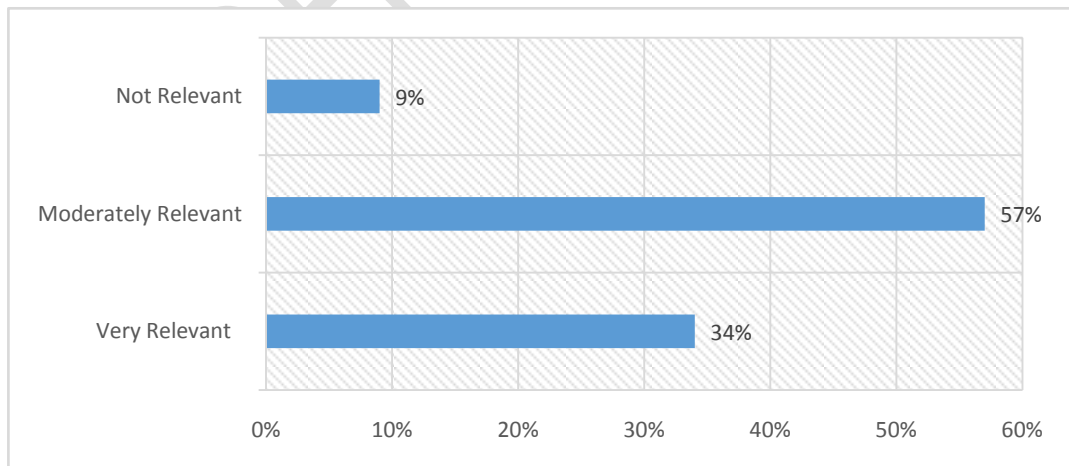
Figure 2: Whether Education on Anti-corruption is Relevant



On the other hand, the key informants suggested the rolling of anti-corruption education to the citizens, where children need to be told that bribing someone to obtain certain services, for example, in hospitals, at police stations, and in school, is bad.

Regarding the degree of relevance of the anticorruption-related content, the majority (57%) of the respondents showed that the current anticorruption-related content is moderately relevant in the fight against corruption, with only 34% of the respondents showing that it was relevant. Nine percent of the respondents showed that it was not relevant at all.

Figure 3: Degree of the Relevance of Anti-Corruption Education by the Media



5. Discussion

The results showed that the majority of respondents did not believe that the media did a good job of covering corruption. Instead, they (the respondents) believed that the media was equally responsible for the rife corruption that has spread throughout society, particularly in the public arena. These results are supported by past studies that demonstrate that the media typically ignore instances of corruption (Anduiza et al., 2013).

In terms of education to the masses about corruption, the study also showed that the public is increasingly frustrated with the media's failure to combat corruption, underscoring the necessity of raising public awareness of the detrimental effects that corrupt practices have on the efficient use of public resources. This is also supported by certain recent studies, such as those of Abba-Aji et al. (2021).

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Furthermore, the vast majority of people argue that social media should play a larger role in the fight against corruption because it allows for real-time reporting of corrupt activities. These results are supported by past research that encourages the use of social media in the fight against corruption, particularly in citizen journalism, because it is likely to engage everyone (Arifin, 2018).

6. Conclusion

Corruption is one of the biggest issues the developing world is currently facing. While it has warped almost all human cultures throughout history in one way or another, its effects have not been the same on all of them. Because corruption is difficult to identify and measure, empirical testing is highly challenging for academics who research it in an effort to develop strategies to reduce it. The media play important duties as the public's watchdog and the fourth estate of the realm, which include opposing and not tolerating corruption. This is well known and may even be universally acknowledged. According to Musa (1996), the frequency with which the media covers an issue can influence how important or unimportant people see it.

The media's responsibility is to provide citizens with sufficient, high-quality information so they can make informed decisions when exercising their rights, which is why the press is known as society's watchdog. According to Schauseil (2019), the media can be crucial in exposing corruption and launching political, judicial, and criminal sanctions against it. Depending on the many levels at which they act, the audiences they target,

and the larger media ecosystem on which they rely, various media genres reveal their strengths and demonstrate their limitations as anti-corruption instruments.

Based on the study, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- (a) From the study findings, it can be said that this study contributed to a growing body of literature that is trying to investigate the role that journalists can play in the fight against corruption vice in society. This stems from the fact that corruption has remained widespread and continues to have far-reaching socioeconomic and political ramifications, hence the need to marshal all the efforts in the fight against this problem.
- (b) The respondents' opinions regarding Ubungo Municipality's reporting of corruption were examined in the current study. The study's conclusions, which were based on the questionnaire and in-depth observations from senior journalists, senior public relations professionals, and corruption campaigners, emphasize the insurmountable difficulties that media still have while covering corruption. For instance, the study's findings revealed that corruption has spread so widely that even journalists now accept it as usual. In any case, it has been reported that certain journalists participate in corrupt activities.
- (c) Some instances of corruption (such as bribes) have become normal in the country, which implies the need by media stakeholders to remind the media of the cardinal responsibility to society: report the evils in society. The perverseness of corruption in the country should not therefore be interpreted as normal; rather, the media fraternity should rise to the occasion and exercise their duty of care to society as required by social responsibility theory.
- (d) Finally, despite the challenges that the media faces in its duty of reporting corruption-related practices in the country, it should be noted that more efforts are still needed; the media should not be looked at as a one-fix-it-all solution. The public and other stakeholders need to be brought on board. For instance, the media might become demoralized if corruption reports by the media are not acted upon and the responsible culprits are brought to the book.

7. Recommendations

Taking the study findings into consideration, the following recommendations are worth considering:

There exists a necessity to incorporate anti-corruption teaching into the curriculum, spanning basic schools to institutions of higher education. Adopting this approach will facilitate the promotion of greater consciousness regarding the detrimental effects of corruption. It is imperative to provide regular internal training programmes for journalists to enhance their ability to effectively report on instances of corruption. While it is comprehensible that certain journalists may have had professional training, it is evident that not all journalists have received such training. This training programme will provide

participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage in professional and ethical reporting on these issues.

CONSENT

It is not applicable.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

It is not applicable.

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