

Examining the Role of New Media in Upholding Good Governance in a Democratic System: Is there Nexus Amid Media and Good Governance?

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Abstract: The paper aimed at examining the role of new media [internet] in upholding good governance and democracy in the South African new dispensation. In this 21st century and Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) era, the role of new media has become complex and biasness, which raises many questions, if their role is relevant in fostering good governance and democracy. It is commonly understood that democracy can generate good governance because academics agree with the idea that democracy is an essential part of good governance. The more transparent and accountable the public institutions are; the better the quality of the government is. This is the reason why many international development organizations promote good governance via the promotion of greater transparency, rule of law, and democratic accountability. In brief, new media plays the watchdog role for the governing system of a country. In this regards, the new media examine the government and on those involved in governance. Moreover, new media also promote policy-making as well as the decision-making process. The new media exposes policy failures and successes, maladministration, corruption, and scandals in the public and private sector. South African government has been bid to ensure good governance in the country since the democratic regime in 1994. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, makes provision for good governance through the adherence of constitutional principles enshrined in Chapter 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. This paper adopted the qualitative research design in the form of documents review to uncover the fundamental role of new media in enhancing governance principles. It embraced the Media Ecology Theory (MET) developed by Marshall McLuhan (1964) which aims to comprehend the social impact of technology and communication. Through an extensive literature review, the results of the paper indicate that new media plays the role of a watch-dog in promoting good governance and democracy.

Keywords: Democracy, Good governance, Media Ecology Theory, New media

1. Introduction

In this era, the new media has become a widely utilised instrument to hold the governing bodies accountable globally including in South Africa (Mlambo, Zubane & Mlambo, 2019). Thus, the new media can function as both catalysts for democracy and an instrument of democratic rule that makes the monitoring and evaluating of good governance by ensuring transparency, accountability and other basic principles. Chiyamwaka (2009) opined that the media holds the power to communicate ideas among the general public or citizens, as a result enabling them to have personal opinions on issues and participate in a public platform. In this new dispensation, a media is utilised to influence the pattern of voting in a democratic society and also has the power to sway the results of an election. According to Oden (2019), good governance remains a source of concern and a gigantic challenge to most developing

countries. Fascinatingly, the South African government has been bidding to ensure good governance in the country since the democratic regime in 1994. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, makes provision for good governance through the adherence of constitutional principles enshrined in section 195(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. The New media function as a watchdog which plays a crucial role in a democratic society wherein the general public should know what their government are doing. Ashraf (2014) indicate that the main democratic function of the new media is to act as a check on the government as well as state-owned entities to ensure good governance and democratic principles like accountability, fairness in the provision of basic services and transparency in the rendering of government functions. The mass media including independent new media should observe the activities of the government and fearlessly expose misuses of official Power.

It is an important hypothesis that the media communicates for the general public, represents the interests of the society and serves as a balance-check on the government, however, in this new dispensation, the role of mass media including new media are fascinating and questionable.

Thus, Strong (1972) and Ashraf (2014) opined that the new media is used to hold the government and government officials accountable. The media exposes what the public officials and governments are doing so that the public or people can judge. Through this function, the new media helps to ensure good governance in a democratic system. Thus, good governance involves the principles of transparency, accountability, fairness and public participation. Media has become extremely critical for the smooth functioning of democracy as well as improving good governance. The author of this paper argues that the new media is an important source of public information, as it is anticipated to uphold the democratic principles of good governance. Therefore, the paper examines the role of new media in upholding good governance in the South African new dispensation.

2. Conceptual Aspects

2.1 Good Governance

Charlick (1992:3) indicated that good governance is the effective management of public affairs through the generation of a regime which sets rules, accepted as legitimate for promoting and enhancing societal values sought by individuals and groups. According to Mamokhere (2019:7) good governance is a process of decision-making at both political and administrative level of government to implement the policies that will improve the quality of life for all members of the community and to improve service delivery. Good governance is about transparency, fairness, and equity, accountability, responsiveness and public participation.

2.2 Democracy

Nwogu (2015:131) defines democracy as a government in which supreme power is invested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through representation. In furtherance of this, Barak (2006) assert that representative democracy which allows freedom of political expression, freedom of speech and freedom of the press are considered to

be the essential rights that allow eligible citizens to be adequately informed and able to vote according to their interests.

2.3 New Media

Maswanganyi and Nkoana (2016) define new media as "all that is related to the internet and interplay between technology, images and sound". The evolution of new media is virtually unpredictable. All the media we refer to old were once called new media. Amer (2014) indicate that "new media technology is any type of application meant to transfer information via digital techniques, computerized systems or data networks. Most forms of new media are interactive and contain compressed data designed to be accessed in a variety of markets compare to the traditional media. The most prevalent examples of new media include Internet-based concepts, like websites, or digital mediums, such as CD-ROMs and DVDs. Anything that is considered old media, such as television, film or paper-based products, are not part of new media". Maswanganyi (2017:114) further allude that new media is internet dependent and the emergence of the worldwide web is a classic example of how new media evolved.

3. Problem Statement

In brief, in this new dispensation, the role new media has become complex and biasness, which raises many questions, if their role is relevant in promoting good governance and socio-economic development in a democratic system. The media is a serious threat to democracy and good governance. It affects the democratic process in various ways. Ashraf (2014) the new media in this dispensation which are profit-oriented deceives the citizens. The readers of the press or followers web-based news are betrayed into believing that what is an advertisement or even political stunt or campaigns. Dahlberg (2004) indicate that people are affected by an even under the public scrutiny, such as the Commission Inquiry on State Capture and Venda Building Society (VBS) Mutual Bank, commonly known as VBS scandals. People should be given a fair trial to explain their position with sincerity and impartiality as the principle of the public government. Ultimately this practice undermines or does harm to the decision-making process (governance) in a democratic society. Prestige authors like Chiyamwaka (2009) questions the role of the media if are political players or honest independent brokers.

4. Method and Materials

To realise the objective of this paper, the author relied extensively on secondary data in gathering relevant and essential information regarding the topic under investigation. The author adopted strict content analysis (documents review) of the available literature relevant to the role of new media in relation to good governance. In other words, the qualitative research design was used in the course of this conference paper. The reason for the adaptation of this design was to uncover the fundamental role of new media in enhancing governance principles in a democratic society. Mlambo *et al.* (2019) argue that qualitative research design in form document reviews enables in-depth scrutiny of the relevant literature to understand to the fundamental and authentic role of media in fostering good governance in a democratic society.

5. Theoretical Perspective

This paper adopted Media Ecology Theory (MET) originated by Marshall McLuhan (1964). The purpose of MET was to comprehend the social influence of technologies and communication. Parameswaran (2008) indicate the media ecology theory focus on how media shape and organise culture of good governance. Also, the MET emphasis on how media and communication processes influence human view, emotion, thoughts, values, and theory mainly focuses on communication studies. Marshall McLuhan (1964) in the MET assumed the influence of technologies including television, radios and internet (digital media). McLuhan in his theory focused on outlining the nexus between technology and societies of different cultures. McLuhan (1964) argues that Internet-based media commonly referred to new media have modernised societies and societies are dramatically becoming reliant on communication technologies like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs and Web-based News pages like News24 and Eyewitness News.

The effect of media technology on society is the key concept of MET, supported by the three main elements: media is infused into every act and action in society, media fixes our perceptions and organizes our experiences, and media tie the world together. Therefore, we cannot escape the presence of media in our lives as it is an influences decision-making process (governance). New media connects the world into a global village; wherein media bring anyone

around the globe into a single social, cultural, political, and economic system (Parameswaran, 2008). As a result, we can receive information promptly. Moreno and Koff (2016) also argue that society has changed and that technology has also changed. The rules of media set forth by MET include inter alia; enhancement, obsolescence, retrieval and reversal – show how technology affects communication through the transformation of new technology (4IR). The MET focuses on the notion that society cannot escape the impact of technology and that technology will forever remain central to almost every action in modern society. The adaptation of Media Ecology Theory suits well in this paper mainly because of the idea that the mass media has transformed from newspapers to web-based news or technological platform which has increased access to information and public participation (good governance and democracy). The citizens can access current press or media news everywhere, at any time and can participate freely through commentary platform. Therefore, this paper has relied extensively on the theory and has contributed significantly to the study.

6. Media's Role in Upholding Good Governance and Democracy

Media is indisputably an imperative element in upholding good governance and stabilising democracy. Mlambo *et al.* (2019:2) affirm that media in a form of civil society organization play an essential role in improving transparency, accountability and good governance in developing countries by contributing to increased public debate on issues like the formulation and implementation of government policy as well as in supporting greater transparency of public revenues, engage in promoting the public's human rights. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2014), the role of the media in promoting good governance is clear. All features of good governance are enabled by a robust and independent media within society. The media are free to monitor, investigate and criticise the public administration's policies and public officials' actions to uphold good governance. Thus, this is the existing nexus between the functioning of the media and good governance. The media is responsible for ongoing checks and assessments of the activities of government and assist in bringing public concerns and voices into the open space by providing a platform for discussion. Maswanganyi (2017)

opined that the 'watchdog role of media' concept explains the media's role in informing the public about the ongoing activities of public institutions. As a result, this paper extensively discusses the role of media in promoting difference pillars of good governance such as transparency, accountability in the decision-making process, access to information, participation and democratic elements. The paper firstly discusses the role of media as a 'watchdog' in promoting democratic governance and secondly discussed how media stabilise democracy.

6.1 The Fundamental Role of Media in Upholding Good Governance

This section extensively discusses the fundamental roles of media in promoting transparency, accountability, access to information and public participation in a South African context.

6.1.1 Guaranteeing Transparency

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, provides a chapter on the values and principles of public administration. This chapter demands that there should be transparency in all the services that are provided by the state organs. This paves the way decisions are taken which should be informed by rules and regulations. As per chapter two of Bill of Rights, the information should be made available for anyone who wants to access it. This includes the concept of consultation which forms the base of governance. Thus, the new media as a watchdog, informer and educator play an important role in fostering transparency and holding government and public officials accountable. To better understand the role of media in upholding transparency, it is vital to first comprehend what is meant by transparency. Chiyamwaka (2007) outline transparency as an act of ensuring that information is available that can be used to measure the authorities' performance and to guard against any possible misuse of power. Transparency in democratic governance can also mean honesty and openness. The media as a watchdog keep an eye on the government, highlight policy failures and reporting scandals of public money can significantly function in ensuring transparency of government. Makgoba (2019) opined that media should prioritise serving the public with information, crucial to helping the public to make informed decisions about matters of public interests, as well as monitoring and exposing social problems like corruption, maladministration and misuse or abuse of power. UNESCO (2014) indicates that:

"greater transparency in public administration allows for checks on these possible conflicts of interest and ensures greater legitimacy for the government. An independent media that are guaranteed access to public documents and decision-making processes can bring possible conflicts of interest to light and assist the government in maintaining clarity in the execution of its directives".

Thus, it can be concluded that the media guarantees transparency by providing information. The Media as the educator and informer circulates government reports, decisions, and policies and afford the citizens an opportunity to comments on social, economic and political issues and thus increase pressure on the government to be more transparent.

6.1.2 Ensuring Accountability and Responsiveness

The media as a 'watchdog' but not least is responsible for making sure public accountability by fostering public entities, elected government and public servants to account for their action. Accountability is a key cornerstone of good governance. Therefore, Chiyamwaka (2007) outline accountability as an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility. In other words, it can be argued that accountability has to do with answerability for conferred responsibility or action. In the same line, the concept of accountability is defined as the obligation of public administrators of any level to answer for their performance as well as how they have implemented their actions or powers (Laxmikanth, 2006:201). This implies that the actions taken and implemented should be compliant with existing laws of the country and within the ethical considerations as expounded in chapter 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. Accountability should be exercised within the framework of the law thus politicians should be accountable to legislatures and the administration accountable to the general public since they serve the public and they receive salaries from this very public purse (Radhika, 2012:27). According to Coronel (2010), the media serves as a watchdog and independent monitor of an elected government, public entities, public leaders or officials and any other institution or person accountable to the public. The media should intend to expose abuse of power, corruption and state capture to hold culprits accountable for their action. For instance, News24 has published an article that revealed how the Republic of South Africa state president Cyril

Ramaphosa funded his CR17 campaign. This article attracted lots of followers whereby citizens were critically debating on the new media, radio stations, television and other digital media platform as well as the Public Protector's Office. As the debate about the story ensued, the state president was requested to explain (account) his position about the allegation. Therefore, Liu (2017:12) affirm that modern media can promote accountability and effectiveness of the state to benefit the citizen's social needs. Moreover, Strong (1972) and Ashraf (2014) indicate that the digital media are intensely utilized to holds the government and public servants accountable and at the sometimes ensuring that public servants are responsive. The media exposes what the public officials and governments are doing so that the public or people can judge. Through this function, the media helps to ensure good governance in a democratic system.

6.1.3 Fostering Access to Information

Mamokhere (2019) argues that lack of access to basic and critical information can contribute to service delivery protests and sometimes undermine democratic governance. Thus, UNESCO (2014) also opined that fostering broader access to information, through the enactment of freedom of information legislation such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 and Promotion of Access to Information Act 02 of 2000, ensures greater citizen participation in governance. This allows for maximum verifiability of information and allows all stakeholders to come to the table equally on important issues. Seyoum (2017) also opined that easy access to information from around the world promotes liberty, competition and choice. It can also be utilised to advance respect for the rule of law, human rights and other indices of good governance such as equality and free and credible elections. Use of the new media enables group thinking to promote concepts such as the independence of the judiciary, the development of civil society, multi-party systems and democratic institutions which are participatory, transparent and accountable. Such the new media empower and unite people across the world.

UNESCO (2014) further opined that "governments should also explore ways to strengthen e-governance which provides media and citizens with direct access to administrative information and decision-making processes. Openness and transparency in the electoral process are also critical. Media coverage

is a crucial component of elections and it is of vital importance that journalists be trained to cover the election campaigns and the elections themselves fairly and impartially, giving equal coverage to the viewpoints concerned". Ngwogu (2015:135) opined that access to information is a pre-requisite for the growth of democracy in the following ways: (a) media enable citizens of a particular country make guided choices rather than opting for ignorance; and (b) constant release of information is a check on elected representatives to uphold their oaths of office, thus carrying out the wishes of their electorates.

The above reasoning points to the fact that democratic systems defend on efficient, accurate dissemination of social, cultural and political information in a societal setting. Matters of public interests are freely discussed among peers, intellectuals and even among ordinary folks to affect most of the actions taken in their communities. In this way, media can be described as an integral part of a democratic process. This, it does, by ensuring freedom of expression, thus freedom of conscience which is facilitated through communication. This is the very essence of individual empowerment which is a crucial ingredient of democracy and governance (Ngwogu, 2015).

Through the promotion of access to information by new media, author of this paper argue that in-depth media coverage during democratic elections help people elect the right people, media reminds politicians about their unfulfilled promises, it expresses loopholes (corruption and state capture) in a democratic system and increases our knowledge about government policies and programmes (e.g. Grade 9 achievement certificate enacted by Department of Basic Education policy). So in a democratic society, an independent media plays a vital role in achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through good governance within each country and at the international level. As discussed above as well, Chiyamwaka (2007) indicates that a key function of the media as an 'informer' is to give the public the information necessary to make a good decision. The media can seek to confirm that the official account, reveal official deceitfulness and correct errors of omission.

6.1.4 Enhance Public Participation

Hornbein and King (2010:717) opined that public participation is crucial to good governance. As much as the public participation is crucial, it

makes the policies to be grounded more in citizens' preferences and they cooperate with policy implementation (Vroom & Jago, 1988; Thomas, 1995). According to UNESCO (2014), the role of new media in fostering public participation is critical as the media report on aspects of the decision-making process and give stakeholders a voice in that process. Freedom of the new media allows for the formation of a public sphere in which a wide range of debates can take place and a variety of viewpoints be represented. The citizenry can use the new media to express their socio-economic concerns especially about the level of service delivery and other government policies and programmes. On the other hand, the government has a responsibility to allow the media to contribute to the participation process, especially in areas where face-to-face participation is not possible. Chiyamwaka (2009) argues that media can operate both as a catalyst for democracy by enhancing public participation and as an instrument of democratic rule that makes the monitoring of good governance possible. The author also argues that the new media holds the power to circulate ideas among citizens, thus enabling them to have personal opinions on issues and participate in public life. Such an argument suggests that the new media can influence the voting pattern in a democracy.

Furthermore, Chiyamwaka (2007) opined that new media as an 'educator and informer' facilitate public participation by ensuring that many voices are heard. The media fills a huge gap by providing plural voices, space and agenda for public dialogue and debate. Plural voices mean those different perspectives will be heard. These differences are so critical in enhancing democratic dialogue and moving forward as a country and as a society. In this way, the so-called new media strengthens the government's capacity to sustain public input and participate in the decision-making and policy-making processes. Author of this paper argues that greater public participation by citizens in a democratic process is one of the key elements of governance. UNESCO (2014) also indicates that greater public participation is crucial for good governance in two ways:

"greater participation by citizens in the decision-making process allows greater transparency and can help ensure that political decisions are adapted to the needs of the people affected by them. Second, greater participation is important for democratic legitimacy, which depends on the

investment people have as citizens in their own governing".

7. The Relevance of Media in Fostering Governance and Democracy

Regardless of the fundamental roles that new media plays in upholding good governance and democracy. The new media ethical conduct is still questionable and complex. Therefore, this paper also investigates the relevance of new media in fostering governance and democracy in a South African context. Van der Byl (2014) opined that since 1994, democratic South Africa has enjoyed a high level of media freedom, with freedom of speech, freedom of the media and access to information enshrined in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The electronic media in this context referred to as new media has been transformed from an entirely state-owned to a diversity of independent media platforms. Van der Byl (2014) opined that the media plays an important role in enabling citizens to learn about and influence public policy. This makes issues of access, ownership and editorial control central questions for democracy and citizenship. These independent institutions are important achievements that contribute to the robustness of the country's democracy and good governance. Therefore, it can be argued that the media's role in stabilizing democracy and enhancing good governance is relevant, however, there is still a need for improvement.

8. Results of the Study

It is found that the new media acts as a watchdog, educator and informer. Thus, the new media promotes democratic principle or good governance such as access to information, accountability, fairness, transparency and public participation. Furthermore, it is discovered that the role of new media is critical as the media report on aspects of the decision-making process and give stakeholders a voice in that process. Freedom of the new media allows for the formation of a public sphere in which a wide range of debates can take place and a variety of viewpoints be represented. The community can use the new media to express their socio-economic concerns especially about the level of service delivery, programmes and other government policies. Thus, it is last but not least affirmed based on content analysis that the role of media is complex and bias which is why this study was conducted to determine its relevance towards good governance.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper examined the role of new media in upholding good governance in a democratic system in the South African context. It is commonly implicit that democracy can create good governance because scholars agree with the idea that democracy is an indispensable part of good governance. The more transparent and accountable the public organizations are; the better the quality of the government is. This is the reason why many international development organizations promote good governance via the promotion of greater transparency, rule of law, and democratic accountability. A transparent, openness and participatory democracy usually empower citizens to monitor and assess the performance of the government as well as to remove officials who cannot meet the public interest. It can be concluded that new media as a watchdog, educator, informer and collectively as a civil society actor plays a vital role in the governing system of a country. In this regards, the new media scrutinize the government and on those involved in governance. New media also promote policy-making as well as the decision-making process. The new media exposes policy failures and successes, maladministration, corruption, and scandals in the public and private sector. South African government has been bid to ensure good governance in the country since the democratic regime in 1994. It can also be concluded that media facilitate public participation by ensuring that many voices are heard. In this regards, an independent media serves as a representative for the general public. It was fostering broader access to information. For instance, media educate the people about government policies by ensuring that people have adequate access to information. In this era, people are adequately informed about government business, budgets, and annual performance etc., through the empowerment of the new media.

This paper recommends that the new media should intend to expose abuse of power, corruption and state capture to hold culprits accountable for their action without biasness and fear. Given the complexity and ambitious of media/journalists to publish articles on the website especially in profit-oriented media which often deceives the citizens. This paper further recommends that journalists/media should thoroughly investigate cases before publishing the story to the general public. Independent new media

should able to promote transparency and openness by ensuring that people have reliable access to basic information to assist them to make informed decisions.

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