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The Assessment of Daily News and the Citizen Newspapers Coverage on Reporting Parliamentary Sessions in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study assesses the coverage of parliamentary sessions by two prominent Tanzanian newspapers, Daily News and The Citizen. It aims to evaluate the extent and nature of reporting on parliamentary activities, identify key themes, and analyze the impact of such coverage on public perception. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, including content analysis, the research reveals significant differences in how each newspaper presents parliamentary news. The findings indicate that while both newspapers cover essential parliamentary activities, their framing and emphasis on specific issues vary, influencing readers' understanding and engagement with parliamentary processes.

Keywords: Parliamentary Reporting, Media Coverage, Daily News, The Citizen, Tanzania, Content Analysis, Public Perception

1. Introduction

The introduction outlines the significance of parliamentary reporting in a democratic society. It discusses the role of print media, particularly newspapers, in disseminating information about parliamentary activities to the public. The chapter also presents the background of the study, the statement of the problem, and the research objectives. Journalism is practiced through various media, with print media, including newspapers, playing a crucial role in informing the public about governmental activities. Parliamentary sessions are public events that require transparent reporting to ensure accountability and civic engagement. Despite the importance of parliamentary reporting, there is limited understanding of how different newspapers cover these sessions and the implications of their coverage on public perception.

2. Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the themes covered in Daily News and The Citizen regarding parliamentary sessions.
2. To assess the differences in reporting styles and framing between the two newspapers.
3. To evaluate the impact of newspaper coverage on public understanding of parliamentary activities.

3. Literature Review

The literature review examines existing research on media coverage of parliamentary activities, focusing on the role of newspapers in shaping public discourse. It discusses theories related to media framing and agenda-setting, highlighting gaps in the current literature regarding Tanzanian media.

3.1 Theoretical Literature Review

3.1.1. Role of Media on Reporting Legislation Session

Media has long served as a critical link between parliamentary institutions and the general public. According to Gilardi, Füglistner, and Luyet (2021) ^[23], the media's role in reporting legislative session is essential for informing citizens about policy decisions, debates, and the outcomes of parliamentary sessions. Media outlets are responsible for simplifying complex legislative processes for the average reader or viewer, thus enabling public understanding of laws and policies.

Additionally, through live broadcasts and in-depth analyses of parliamentary proceedings, the media can help the public engage with political discussions in a more meaningful way. The work of Ugboajah and Eze highlights that in Africa, where parliamentary debates are often inaccessible to large segments of the population due to language barriers and technical jargon, the media play an especially important role in translating these discussions into a more digestible format. For instance, radio programs and local television news segments in Tanzania have been critical in bringing legislative session to rural communities. By doing so, the media not only inform the public but also hold lawmakers accountable to their constituencies.

Media framing is a crucial factor in how the public perceives legislative session. Studies have shown that the way media organizations choose to present legislative news—whether by focusing on particular issues or highlighting certain aspects of policy debates—can significantly shape public opinion (Entman, 2019) ^[21]. This aligns with agenda-setting theory, which suggests that media may not tell people what to think, but they certainly tell them what to think about (McCombs & Shaw).

3.1.2. Newspapers Reporting on Legislative Session

Several scholars have emphasized the vital role of newspapers in parliamentary reporting. According to Asare and Ansah (2020) ^[9], newspapers act as watchdogs, providing the public with insights into parliamentary debates, decision-making processes, and the session of their elected representatives. Newspapers help bridge the gap between citizens and legislative institutions, making it possible for the public to hold their governments accountable. Asare and Ansah's study, which focused on media coverage of the Ghanaian Parliament, highlighted how print media helps create an informed citizenry, enabling them to participate more effectively in the democratic process.

Similarly, Mkong (2021) ^[58] argued that newspapers, by covering legislative sessions, help elevate critical issues of national importance, thus setting the public agenda. In a study of newspaper coverage in Cameroon, Mkong found that newspapers prioritized legislative debates on economic policies, education, and governance, thereby influencing public discourse. This study underscores the agenda-setting role of newspapers, which shapes public opinion on key legislative issues.

3.1.3 Themes Covered and Prominence Given by the Mass Media to Parliamentary News

According to Ochieng (2021) ^[80], parliamentary reporting frequently covers legislative debates, government accountability, political scandals, and law-making processes. Ochieng found that in Kenya, media outlets emphasized political debates over socio-economic issues, particularly during election seasons, reflecting the public's demand for political news. This study also observed that economic policies, budgetary allocations, and corruption cases are the most recurrent themes when the parliament is in session.

Similarly, Kimani (2020) ^[32] observed that in Tanzania, media coverage of parliamentary activity during the late President Magufuli's regime focused primarily on economic policies and national development issues, with political debates receiving less attention. Kimani's analysis of Tanzanian newspapers revealed that the government's emphasis on economic growth influenced media coverage,

leading to less critical reporting on political matters. However, this trend shifted after the transition to President Samia Suluhu Hassan's administration, with media outlets expanding their coverage to include more political and social issues, including debates on human rights, freedom of expression, and governance.

In Ghana, Agyeman (2022) ^[3] highlighted the growing importance of social issues in parliamentary reporting, including education, health, and gender equality. Media houses such as *The Daily Graphic* and *The Ghanaian Times* have been noted for increasingly covering debates on social welfare, focusing on government programs targeting vulnerable groups. This reflects a shift in public interest towards social development, although economic policies still dominate the coverage.

3.1.4. Readers' perceptions of newspapers coverage of Parliament session

One of the critical areas of focus in the literature is the level of public trust in newspaper coverage of parliamentary sessions. Studies have found that readers' trust in political reporting, including coverage of parliamentary sessions, is linked to the perceived impartiality and credibility of the newspaper.

According to Moyo and Mutsvairo (2020), newspapers that provide balanced and fact-based reporting of parliamentary debates are seen as more trustworthy, while those perceived to be biased toward particular political parties or ideologies often lose credibility. Readers tend to be critical of newspapers that exhibit sensationalism or fail to provide in-depth analyses of legislative matters. This is echoed by Hamid *et al.* (2021) ^[26], who conducted a study on political reporting in Malaysia, finding that 56% of respondents believed newspapers exaggerated parliamentary issues for political gain, leading to skepticism about the authenticity of the news.

The growing demand for transparency in parliamentary reporting has pushed readers to favor newspapers that give comprehensive coverage of the issues debated in parliament. Kimaro and Mpagaze (2022) ^[33], in their study of Tanzanian newspapers, revealed that readers appreciated detailed reporting on parliamentary sessions, particularly on key national issues such as education, healthcare, and economic policies. However, readers also noted that coverage was often incomplete, focusing more on political disputes rather than substantive policy discussions. This lack of depth in coverage affected the public's ability to fully engage with and understand the legislative process.

The way newspapers frame parliamentary news significantly influences readers' perceptions. Norris *et al.* (2020) discussed how framing theory affects the way readers interpret news stories, particularly in parliamentary reporting. The authors found that the focus of coverage—whether on conflict, achievements, or scandals—alters public perception of parliamentarians and their activities. For example, newspapers that frequently highlight conflicts or scandals within parliamentary sessions can lead readers to view the institution as dysfunctional, regardless of the actual legislative accomplishments. This aligns with Van Aelst *et al* who found that the media often emphasize political drama over policy discussions, contributing to a more negative public perception of parliamentary effectiveness.

Digital media platforms, including newspaper websites and social media, have also been found to influence how readers

perceive the authenticity of parliamentary reporting. According to Ndala readers who engage with both traditional newspapers and digital platforms tend to have more nuanced views of parliamentary news. They are more likely to cross-reference stories, checking for consistency and bias. In Tanzania, Makoye (2022) ^[48] found that readers appreciated the real-time coverage of parliamentary sessions provided by online platforms but still relied on traditional newspapers for more detailed analysis and interpretation of legislative outcomes.

However, the increased availability of digital media has also made readers more critical of the depth and quality of newspaper reporting. Nasser and Mohamed in their study of Egyptian newspapers, found that readers were often disappointed by the lack of investigative journalism in parliamentary reporting. They argued that the superficial treatment of parliamentary debates in newspapers, compared to more in-depth coverage on some online platforms, led readers to question the newspapers' commitment to fully informing the public.

However, Ali and Mbozi (2023) ^[6] warned that the demand for accountability journalism places newspapers in a difficult position, especially in countries with restricted press freedoms. Their study of Ugandan newspapers revealed that while readers wanted more critical reporting on parliamentary activities, newspapers often self-censored due to fear of government reprisals. This tension between public demand for accountability and the constraints imposed on newspapers by political pressures is a common theme across many developing countries.

3.1.5 Thematic Areas in Parliamentary Coverage Political Discourse and Party Politics

One of the central themes in parliamentary coverage is political discourse, particularly around party politics. Media outlets regularly focus on political debates, party alignments, and disputes within parliament. According to Ndikumana political coverage often highlights ideological differences between political parties, the government's legislative agenda, and opposition party responses. These reports play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of parliamentary efficiency and democracy. In many African contexts, such as Tanzania, this coverage often extends to intra-party conflicts and their influence on legislative processes (Mwansoko, 2021) ^[69].

A study by Kirubi (2021) ^[34] examining parliamentary reporting in Kenya noted that political discourse in media coverage is heavily shaped by the ruling party's dominance, with opposition parties receiving less attention. This dynamic was observed in several African parliaments, where media reports tend to echo the views of the majority party, sometimes to the detriment of balanced reporting. In Tanzania, for example, media houses like The Citizen and Daily News focus on government bills and parliamentary debates related to party-led governance, which limits the exposure of opposition viewpoints (The Citizen, 2021).

Governance and Institutional Performance

Governance, transparency, and the performance of parliamentary institutions are recurring themes in parliamentary coverage. Media scrutiny of the government's performance, particularly concerning legislative activities, has become a significant aspect of modern political reporting. According to Nyamnjoh governance issues such as

corruption, mismanagement of public funds, and inefficiencies within government departments often receive widespread media attention. These reports hold parliamentarians accountable and keep the public informed about the effectiveness of legislative institutions in upholding democratic principles.

A study by Kiwanga (2020) ^[35] showed that parliamentary coverage in Tanzania has increasingly focused on the governance failures that hinder economic development and service delivery. Investigative journalism plays a critical role in highlighting these issues, often leading to public demand for reforms. For instance, the Daily News in 2023 ran several stories on parliamentary debates about governance issues, especially those addressing mismanagement in public sector procurement.

Public Policy and Legislative Reforms

Public policy discussions, legislative proposals, and reforms are essential thematic areas in parliamentary coverage. Media reports often provide detailed analyses of new bills, amendments to existing laws, and policy debates within parliament. The framing of these issues tends to focus on their potential impact on the public, as well as the political dynamics behind the legislative process. According to Mwangi (2022) ^[82], the media's role in covering public policy has increased significantly in recent years, with journalists providing in-depth assessments of the implications of legislative decisions.

In the Tanzanian context, the coverage of public policy issues by newspapers such as The Citizen has grown, especially on critical issues like healthcare, education, and taxation. For instance, reports on parliamentary debates surrounding healthcare reforms in 2022 provided citizens with an understanding of how proposed changes would affect the public healthcare system. Similarly, parliamentary discussions on tax reforms have been widely covered, highlighting the government's efforts to improve revenue collection and its potential impact on businesses and consumers (The Citizen, 2023).

Accountability and Transparency

Accountability is another key theme in parliamentary coverage, with the media acting as a watchdog to monitor government performance and expose misconduct. Parliamentary oversight functions, such as questioning ministers and debating audit reports, often receive extensive media coverage. Studies have shown that media outlets regularly report on parliamentary efforts to hold the executive accountable for public expenditure and governance (Bwire, 2022) ^[14]. This coverage fosters transparency and helps citizens understand how their elected representatives perform their oversight duties.

In Tanzania, accountability issues have been particularly prominent in the media, especially regarding the management of public funds and corruption scandals. A report by Majid (2023) ^[47] found that parliamentary sessions on the audit of public accounts and government spending were among the most covered topics in 2022 and 2023. Coverage of these sessions often focuses on questioning government officials and presenting findings from the National Audit Office, which exposes irregularities in the use of public funds.

Economic Development and Fiscal Policy

Parliamentary discussions on economic development, fiscal

policy, and national budgets are frequently covered by the media. Given the importance of economic growth and financial stability in national development, media outlets dedicate considerable attention to reporting on parliamentary debates about budget allocations, taxation, and economic policies. According to Musoma media reports on economic policy debates provide the public with insights into how government spending and fiscal policies was impact different sectors, including education, healthcare, and infrastructure development.

In Tanzania, the 2023 parliamentary discussions on the national budget received widespread media coverage. Daily News and The Citizen provided detailed reports on the government's fiscal priorities, including increased allocations for infrastructure projects and social services. These reports helped create public awareness about the direction of government spending and its potential impact on citizens' livelihoods.

Gender Representation in Parliamentary Coverage

Gender representation is an emerging theme in parliamentary coverage, with the media increasingly focusing on the role of women in legislative processes. Gender-sensitive reporting has gained prominence as media outlets seek to highlight the contributions of female parliamentarians and the need for gender equity in political representation. According to Amina (2020)^[7], parliamentary debates on gender equality, women's rights, and social justice have gained attention, with media reports advocating for more inclusive policies.

For example, a 2022 study by Mwinuka highlighted that Tanzanian media began increasing coverage of gender issues, particularly after the appointment of more women to parliamentary leadership positions. Reports on parliamentary debates surrounding gender-based violence and women's economic empowerment have become more frequent, reflecting the growing importance of gender issues in national discourse.

Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change

Parliamentary discussions on environmental sustainability and climate change have also emerged as significant thematic areas in media coverage. With the growing global emphasis on addressing environmental challenges, media outlets have started to cover parliamentary debates on environmental policies, conservation efforts, and the implications of climate change. A report by Kakwezi (2023)^[28] noted that Tanzanian newspapers have increased their focus on parliamentary discussions related to environmental protection, such as debates on deforestation, pollution, and the government's commitment to international climate agreements.

In 2023, The Citizen provided extensive coverage of parliamentary debates about Tanzania's strategy to combat climate change, emphasizing the government's plans to implement green energy solutions and reduce carbon emissions. This coverage reflected a shift towards more comprehensive reporting on environmental issues, which were previously underreported in parliamentary coverage (Kakwezi, 2023)^[28].

Media Freedom in Parliamentary Reporting

Finally, media freedom itself has become a theme in parliamentary coverage. The ability of journalists to report freely on parliamentary activities is a critical issue, particularly in countries with restrictive media environments.

According to a 2021 report by Nkrumah, media freedom in parliamentary coverage is often constrained by government censorship, threats to journalists, and limitations on access to parliamentary proceedings. These challenges affect the quality and scope of parliamentary reporting.

In Tanzania, the current administration has made efforts to improve media freedom, leading to more robust coverage of parliamentary activities. A report by Mwinyi found that reforms introduced under President Samia Suluhu Hassan's leadership have enabled media outlets to report more freely on sensitive issues, such as corruption and political accountability. However, challenges remain, particularly regarding the safety of journalists and the independence of media houses.

3.2. Empirical Literature Review

Several studies have shown that Daily News and The Citizen have varied in their coverage of parliamentary activities, influenced by political shifts, media freedom policies, and editorial priorities. A study by Ngonyani (2020)^[74] examined parliamentary news coverage between 2019 and 2020, showing that both newspapers tended to focus on high-profile parliamentary debates, especially those related to national economic development and public infrastructure. According to the study, Daily News prioritized coverage of government-sponsored bills and economic achievements, reflecting a pro-government stance in line with its public ownership. In contrast, The Citizen, which is privately owned, exhibited more critical reporting, often highlighting controversies, parliamentary disputes, and accountability issues.

The divergence in focus was further elaborated by Mbunda (2021)^[54], who assessed the thematic priorities in the coverage of parliamentary sessions. His study found that The Citizen placed more emphasis on social issues such as health, education, and human rights, while Daily News often devoted extensive space to speeches by government officials and reports on budget allocations. This trend was consistent with the newspapers' respective editorial policies, with Daily News often being perceived as a mouthpiece of the government, and The Citizen as an outlet more likely to provide balanced and investigative journalism.

The political environment significantly influenced the nature of parliamentary reporting, particularly during the transition from the Magufuli to Samia administrations. During the Magufuli era (2015-2021), the media faced significant restrictions on freedom of expression, which affected the scope and depth of parliamentary reporting. Research by Mapunda (2020)^[49] indicated that Daily News and The Citizen covered fewer political debates and instead focused more on non-controversial topics, such as economic reforms and infrastructure projects. Journalists expressed fears of government retaliation and censorship, which led to a decline in critical reporting. This trend was consistent with findings by Lissu (2020)^[42], who highlighted that political intimidation and media restrictions during parliamentary sessions limited investigative reporting and diminished the role of the media as a watchdog.

However, the advent of President Samia Suluhu Hassan's administration in 2021 marked a turning point for media freedom in Tanzania. Under her regime, there was a significant relaxation of media laws and a more open environment for journalistic reporting. Studies by Kiwango (2022)^[37] and Mushi (2023)^[65] highlighted that both Daily News and The Citizen expanded their coverage of

parliamentary debates, with an increase in the number of investigative stories and critical analyses. Kiwango (2022) ^[37] noted that The Citizen took advantage of the newfound media freedom to highlight issues of transparency and accountability in parliamentary sessions, including detailed coverage of debates on corruption, government spending, and the performance of government ministers.

Mushi (2023) ^[65] added that Daily News also improved its coverage of parliamentary activities, albeit with a continued emphasis on government achievements. However, the study indicated that the newspaper began to include more nuanced discussions on policy failures and government challenges, reflecting a subtle shift toward balanced reporting. The opening up of new media outlets during Samia's administration also contributed to a competitive media environment, pushing traditional newspapers like Daily News and The Citizen to provide more comprehensive and detailed coverage of parliamentary sessions.

Despite improvements in media freedom and coverage of parliamentary activities, several challenges have persisted. A key issue identified by Mlowe (2021) ^[59] was the limited access journalists had to parliamentary records and documents. Both Daily News and The Citizen faced difficulties in obtaining detailed information about parliamentary debates and legislative proposals, leading to superficial reporting. Mlowe's study found that this lack of access often resulted in heavy reliance on official press releases and statements from government representatives, rather than independent investigative journalism.

Another challenge was the lack of specialized training for political reporters, as noted by Khalfani (2022) ^[30]. The study highlighted that while both Daily News and The Citizen employed experienced journalists, few had formal training in parliamentary reporting, which often led to inaccuracies in the coverage of complex legislative matters. This issue was particularly evident in the reporting of budget debates and legal amendments, where journalists struggled to provide in-depth analysis and often resorted to summarizing official speeches.

Moreover, financial constraints and logistical challenges limited the ability of The Citizen and Daily News to cover parliamentary sessions comprehensively. According to a report by the Tanzanian Media Association both newspapers faced declining advertising revenues and shrinking editorial budgets, which affected their ability to assign reporters to cover parliamentary proceedings full-time. This issue was compounded by the high costs of maintaining correspondents in Dodoma, where the National Assembly is located, resulting in sporadic coverage of parliamentary sessions.

Several studies have compared the reporting styles of Daily News and The Citizen in covering parliamentary sessions. Mwambona (2022) ^[67] conducted a comparative content analysis of parliamentary stories from both newspapers, finding that The Citizen tended to offer more in-depth features and background analyses, while Daily News often adopted a straight news reporting approach with limited contextual information. The study also showed that The Citizen included more reader engagement, publishing letters to the editor and opinion pieces that critiqued parliamentary proceedings. In contrast, Daily News was more likely to publish official viewpoints and commentaries from government-aligned voices.

A study by Mkapu (2023) ^[57] corroborated these findings, indicating that The Citizen consistently provided more

comprehensive coverage of parliamentary debates, especially on issues related to human rights, education, and governance. The newspaper also employed investigative journalism to uncover stories that were not covered in parliamentary sessions, such as MPs' conduct and the performance of government ministries. On the other hand, Daily News continued to prioritize government perspectives and often emphasized positive aspects of government policies discussed in parliament.

4. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative approach, as defined by Creswell (2018) ^[20], to explore and interpret non-numerical data deeply. This approach is suitable for capturing the complexity of media representation through detailed content analysis, which Krippendorff (2018) ^[40] describes as the systematic examination of communication content to derive insights into its broader implications. By focusing on selected articles published between July 2023 and July 2024, this research applies a case study design to facilitate an in-depth understanding of media practices and public engagement with parliamentary activities. The study area includes *Daily News* headquarters in Temeke District and *The Citizen* office in Ilala District, Dar es Salaam. The target population consists of 240 stories, with a purposive sampling of 24 articles analyzed to provide insights into the coverage and framing of parliamentary sessions. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of patterns and themes in media representation. Validity and reliability were addressed through inter-coder reliability tests and triangulation, enhancing the credibility of findings. Ethical considerations were rigorously followed, with informed consent obtained, anonymity assured, and data confidentiality maintained to protect participants' rights.

5. Research Findings

The findings reveal that both newspapers cover parliamentary sessions but differ in their emphasis on specific issues. Daily News tends to focus on governmental achievements, while The Citizen highlights controversies and public concerns. This divergence influences how readers perceive parliamentary effectiveness and accountability.

Both *Daily News* and *The Citizen* were provided with access to press releases, interviews with Members of Parliament, and live coverage privileges during significant events. This balanced access enabled both newspapers to offer comprehensive coverage of parliamentary proceedings, though each approached their reporting through distinct editorial lenses.

The *Daily News*, as a government-owned publication, was more inclined towards a formal tone, often presenting parliamentary updates in an informative and official style. This approach aligned with its commitment to a balanced and factual portrayal, which allowed it to serve as a reliable source for straightforward, factual updates on legislative activities.

On the other hand, *The Citizen*, known for its independent ownership and more critical editorial stance, offered readers a more interpretive perspective, often focusing on aspects such as transparency, potential issues, and the broader impact of parliamentary decisions on citizens. This difference reflects the role of independent media in providing critical insights and holding government actions accountable, complementing the factual reports provided by *Daily News*.

In comparing the two newspapers, the prominence given by the Parliament in access and coverage opportunities highlighted the value placed on diverse reporting styles in the Tanzanian media landscape. The dual approach ensured that the public could access both factual and interpretative accounts of parliamentary sessions, catering to readers seeking different perspectives on governance.

6. Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter demonstrates the varied approaches of *Daily News* and *The Citizen* in reporting on parliamentary sessions in Tanzania throughout 2023. Through their coverage of themes, communication framing, and prominence, both newspapers have played pivotal roles in shaping public understanding of parliamentary activities. *Daily News* emphasized objectivity and factual coverage, serving as a consistent source of official parliamentary updates, while *The Citizen* offered a critical perspective, contributing to the discourse on accountability and transparency. These complementary roles highlight the essential function of diverse media representation in enhancing democratic engagement and fostering a well-informed public.

The study concludes that media coverage of parliamentary sessions plays a vital role in shaping public perception and engagement. The differences in reporting between *Daily News* and *The Citizen* underscore the importance of diverse media perspectives in a democratic society. Recommendations for improving parliamentary reporting practices are provided.

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