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Research Article

Impact of Citizens Do-It-Yourself Activities on Digital Platform of Community Policing in Malawi

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Abstract

Digital platform has become catalyst for effective and efficient enforcement of rule of law in human society. This study examines impact of citizens do-it-yourself activities on digital platform of community policing in Malawi. Under exploratory sequential mixed methods design, Interviews followed purposive sampling targeting four focus group discussions of 10 participants each using interview guide instrument. House hold survey identified 432 respondents guided by Yamene (1969) formular, and were randomly distributed within 10 centers of Muloza, structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Transcribed interviews were coded, then grouped into sub themes, further merged into themes responding to research questions with help of NVivo application. House hold survey analysis implored descriptive statistics in SPSS version 20. Guided by pragmatics philosophical assumptions under lens of social-disorganization, democratic participation, and broken window theories, findings reveal citizens have participated in virtual interaction through ICTs in community policing, characterized by formal and non-formal wide participation improving police accountability and transparency in handling policing and, citizens are satisfied with level of engagement during virtual interaction. Multinominal regression shows gender has no impact on factors that influence Do-It-Yourself participation are (1) communication and sharing information between citizens and police p=.747, (2) to be aware of rights violations and safety needs, (3) people's involvement in rights violations and suspicious activities p=.708, (4) citizen's involvement in crime prevention and community policing efforts, (5) to maintain community dialogue and engagement p=.088, (6) looking for faster emergency response times, and (7) to provide evidence and share information with authorities p=.806. Effectiveness of digital participation of Do-It-Yourself is that it is at random and influenced by different causes surrounding personal interests. As such they could be engaged on daily, weekly, occasionally or monthly basis as long as citizens secure their environments. The discussion is that while other studies reveal that ICTs may reduce corruption, this current study reveals that flexibility and user friendly of ICTs allowing formal and non-formal wide participation that has improved police accountability and transparency in policing empowers citizens to participate claiming for their rights to secure their environments in community policing. Based on findings the study recommends community guardians including duty bearers like police officers to enlighten citizens to embrace ICTs for more security empowerment to

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1. Introduction

Malawi vision 2063 calls for Malawians to work towards realizing a self and reliant nation. To achieve self-reliance and inclusive nation there is need for adherence to the rule of law. Observance and enforcement of the rule of law empowers and cultivates confidence in the citizenry, especially where those that feel excluded, marginalized or are underprivileged recognize and benefit from its implementation. However, to achieve the efficient and effective enforcement of laws remains a challenge. The rule of law is important for shared prosperity in any society. Kumwenda *et al.* [8, 9] conclude that digital community policing may help to reduce corruption. Haberfeld and Petropoulos [5] report that use of information communication technology facilitates already existing policing programs. This study focuses on the impact of citizen do-it-yourself activities on digital platform of community policing in Malawi, a case of Muloza.

Clavell *et al.* [2] in Spain, report that amidst scarcity of resources, use of digital platform can help overcome the challenges of resources and improve security with less agents on the ground. Certainly, information communication technology is just a catalyst for achieving effective and efficient enforcement of rule of law. The digital platform has allowed individual citizens, groups as well as police take part in enforcing rule of law. Therefore, social media becomes platform for social interactions forming social networks for solving society's problems [9]. Statistics indicate that by 2021 digital platform active users are increasing and are growing over 4.2 billion in the world for various socialization aspects [14].

The joining of digital platform has been influenced by various factors such as; (1) telephones are a need to have for communication [15, 8, 9]. (2) The accessibility of smartphone applications and social media channels influence citizens to participate in surveillance practices in neighborhoods. The already freely available WhatsApp applications have influenced citizens to form WhatsApp groups for prompt and easy messaging communications. (3) Since these social media applications are owned by commercial institutions, people's messages are not monitored by government institutions and conversations play out in an invisible and uncontrolled environment [11-13].

Although digital platform accords people everyday connections, where citizens watch one another in person and spend time checking their environment and the behaviors of other citizens in that space. However, there are some citizens who get actively stimulated to take this greater responsibility within their communities to manage potential security risks. They become police service volunteers to observe rights violations. With great responsibility to help the police, citizens assume responsibility to manage safety and security of not only themselves but their communities and fellow citizens [12].

Citizen's adaptation to using digital platforms and initiatives have revolutionized relations between citizens and police traditions. Digital platforms enable facilitation of initiatives that citizens do in the neighborhoods to interact with aim to warn, and inform each other about various activities ranging from rights violations to emergencies. Virtual interactions on above matters help citizens actively monitor and protect their area increasing safety, social cohesion, collective efficacy and community guardianship [12].

The digital platform facilitates interactions amongst individual citizens, groups as well as the police to take part in addressing security concerns. Since ICTs are just catalyst to manage virtual security interactions, the interactions may vary from spontaneous ordering tendencies, individual preferred, individual-oriented practices to police-planned surveillance projects. Virtual participation does not have central technical rules but are motivated by many factors such as; (i) There are no one-size-fits-all central participatory universal guidelines: the one who feels it, knows when to join and participate. (ii) Anxiety for knowledge of surroundings (iii) Sharing of intelligence with authorities (iv) Interacting and socializing on security matters within their neighborhood, and (v) Prompt for safe response [12].

Contrary to Yero *et al.*, [16] the community policing prophet of doom, who lamented that too much empowerment to citizens through digital platform may create community-oriented government that may influence citizens to abuse it by bringing an uprise to a revolution to become "government of the people" or rather the proletariat state. Kumwenda *et al.* [9] observe that citizens use digital platform to challenge the state of decline in their environment for various reasons such as; sharing intelligence amongst themselves and with police [3], communicating with village authorities [4]. Managing security activities in their neighborhood security by sharing information, mobilizing and organizing patrols and coordinating amongst themselves and with police [9]. Social media has allowed minority groups such as homeless, prostitutes report of rights violations [1, 7].

This study would want to examine the impact of citizens Do-it-yourself activities on digital platform of community policing in Malawi. Specifically, this paper will answer three following questions; (1) Do citizens participate in virtual interaction activities on digital platform of community policing? (2) What are factors that influence citizens to play do-it-yourself activities on digital platforms of community policing? (3) How effective is do-it-yourself activities on digital platform of community policing?

2. Research Method

2.1. Research Location

Study area is Muloza in Mulanje, positioned at 36 K 792628.97 m E 8220322.32 m S, and is far from main land Mulanje with almost 30 kms barriered by Mount Mulanje, moreover, has porous borders attributed by shallow Muloza and Ruo rivers that increase likelihood of un-charted routes. Furthermore, citizens are engaged in international intermarriages between Malawians and Mozambican that fuel them to claim reciprocal rights on basic needs from both nations thereby increasing reciprocal dual movements that pave way to criminal opportunists to attempt criminalize vulnerable points. The Vila De Milange District Mozambican province is less than 10 km to the eastern side from the border [8, 9].

2.2. Study Framework

This is a mixed methods design, starts with qualitative data collection analysis followed by quantitative data collection and analysis. Interviews are used to explore and examine issues into depth while house hold survey triangulates qualitative results. Interviews and house hold survey allow collection of data from multiple angles to yield reliable generalizations.

2.3. Techniques for Collecting Data

2.3.1. Qualitative Interviews

Interview phase used purposive sampling to identify 10 police participants, 10 business participants, 10 community policing forum participants, 10 citizens for focus group interviews. The respondents were conveniently selected within their locations because are actors in the phenomena. The qualitative data collection used interview guide instrument.

2.3.2. Quantitative Survey

The research of 432 participants was attained guided by Yamene (1969) formular from total population of 23, 408 [8]. The 432 respondents were randomly distributed in the 10 locations of Limbuli, Muloza, Gawani, Maliyera, Naamani, Sathawa, Songwe, Manayamba, Namasalima, Ruo within

research site. The structured questionnaire instrument was used to collect data from respondents [9].

2.3.3. Data Analysis

Qualitative data was transcribed, coded, codes grouped into sub-themes and sub-themes into themes responding to research questions. The process was aided by the NVivo (Version 12) software package. To avoid loss of context during the coding process researchers captured exact wording from interviewees [9].

Household survey analysed data using descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages, and charts on each question from the structured questionnaire aided by Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 20 [9].

3. Results

3.1. Participant's Profile

Research participants consisted of 49.1% females and 50.9% males with average age of 38.96 years almost 57.2% youth category. Comprising 5.3% no longer in marriage, 7.2% separated, 10.2% widowed, 20.8% not married, and 56.5% in marriage. The levels of education were, 16.0% never gone to and 2.5% gone to adult school. Majority of participants achieved primary, secondary, and tertiary education 32.2%, 38.9, and 10.4% respectively. Occupations included, 6.7% school going, 7.6% casual labor 16, 16.2% formal employment, 16.4% skilled employment, 26.2% farmer and 26.9% petty traders/business of average income of MK 103, 262.82 [10].

3.2. Do-It-Yourself Participation on Digital Platform of Community Policing

In response to the question *"Have you ever Participated in a virtual interaction in community policing activities?"* From transcribed data analysis during the qualitative phase result shows the theme that came out persistently during the focus group discussion was that citizens participate virtually through ICTs on issues related to community policing. To verify and triangulate the qualitative results, house hold survey findings in figure 1 below show 76.2% of respondents agree to have participated in virtual interaction through ICT in community policing.

Furthermore, house hold survey result in figure 2 below, indicate that 91.4% of respondents agree that ICT has opened informal wide participation in community policing. Figure 3 below, reveal that over 80% agree that ICT allows them to follow formal community policing structures when managing security related matters within their neighbourhoods. Figure 4 below, show 91.7% of respondents agree that non-formal wide participation of citizens in community policing has improved police accountability and transparency in handling policing. Figure 5 below, reveal that 71.6%

of respondents agree that they were satisfied with level of engagement during virtual interaction in community policing activities.

The implication in the results show that citizens Do-It-Yourself participation through ICTs in community policing has allowed citizens to interact in both formal and non-formal ways, there is wide participation that has allowed authorities to be accountable and transparent in handling community policing issues.

The study result is similar to findings by Kumwenda [8-10] that ICT provide formal and non-formal wide participation that help to reduce corruption.

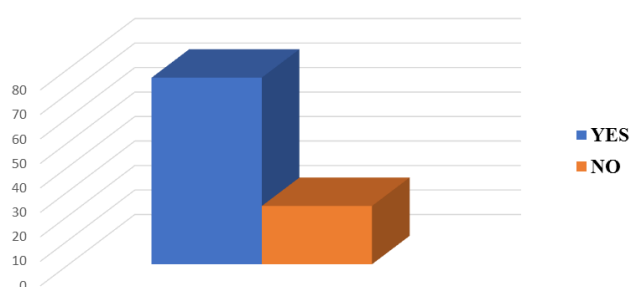Citizens participate in a virtual interaction related to community policing

Figure 1. Citizen virtual interaction through ICT in community policing.

In summary findings in the above figure 1, reveal that 76.2% of respondents have participated in virtual interaction through ICT in community policing.

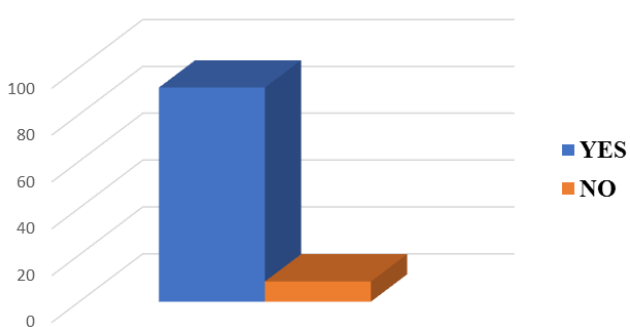ICT opened informal wide participation of citizens other than formal community policing structures

Figure 2. ICT opened wide participation.

In summary findings in above figure 2, indicate that 91.4% of respondents agree that ICT has opened wide participation in community policing.

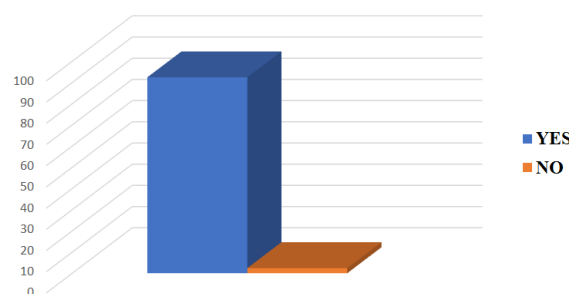ICT usage in security matters follow established formal community policing structures

Figure 3. ICT usage following established formal community policing structures.

In summary results in the above figure 3, reveal that over 80% agree that ICT allows them to follow formal community policing structures.

The formal and non-formal wide participation of citizens in community policing has improved police accountability and transparency in handling policing
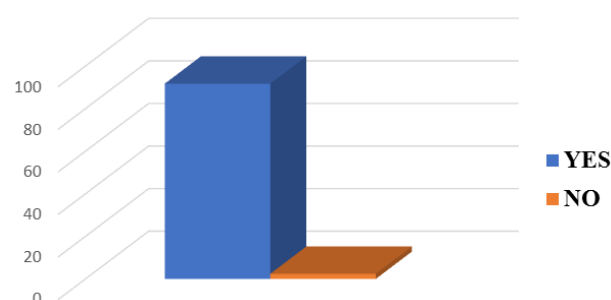

Figure 4. ICT facilitates Formal and non-formal wide participation improves accountability and transparency.

In summary results in above figure 4, show 91.7% of respondents agree that people's non-formal wide participation in community policing has improved police accountability and transparency

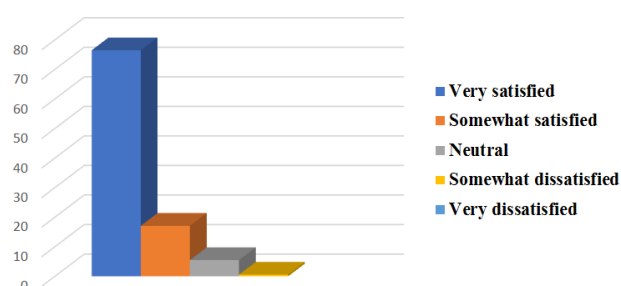Citizen's satisfaction with the level of engagement and discussion during the virtual interaction

Figure 5. Satisfaction with engagement during virtual interaction.

In summary findings in the above figure 5, reveal that 71.6%

of respondents agree that they were satisfied with level of engagement during virtual interaction in community policing activities.

3.3. Factors that Influence Do-It-Yourself Participation on Digital Platform of Community Policing

In response to the question *"What factors influence citizens to play do-it-yourself activities on digital platforms of community policing?"* According to analyzed qualitative data, the most popular themes that emerged from participants responses during focus group discussions responding to above question were communication and sharing information, to be aware of safety concerns, citizen's involvement in rights violations and suspicious activities, citizen's involvement in crime prevention, yearning for community dialogue and engagement, citizens looking for faster emergency response times and interest to provide evidence and share information with authorities.

To triangulate above qualitative result, house hold survey result in figure 6 below, reveal communication and sharing information between citizens and police at 77.7%, To be aware of rights violations and safety needs at 57.0%, people's involvement in rights violations and suspicious activities at

56.5%, involvement in crime prevention and community policing efforts at 42.3%, community dialogue and engagement at 29.3%, faster emergency response times at 17.0% to provide evidence and share information with authorities at 11.9%. Table 1 on page Multinominal regression shows gender has no impact on factors that influence Do-It-Yourself participation activities on digital platform of community policing. Communication and sharing information between citizens and police p=.747, citizen's involvement in rights violations and suspicious activities p=.708, to maintain community dialogue and engagement p=.088, to provide evidence and share information with authorities p=.806.

The implication is that every citizen is capable of engaging in Do-It-Yourself activities on digital platform of community policing as dictated by the security concerns surrounding their situation.

Research results are similar to Kumwenda [9] that Citizens are more security oriented than police on securing their environment. Every individual is empowered to play their role in security disregarding gender. Similarly, Hoogensen [6] people perceive security as a democratic basic right.

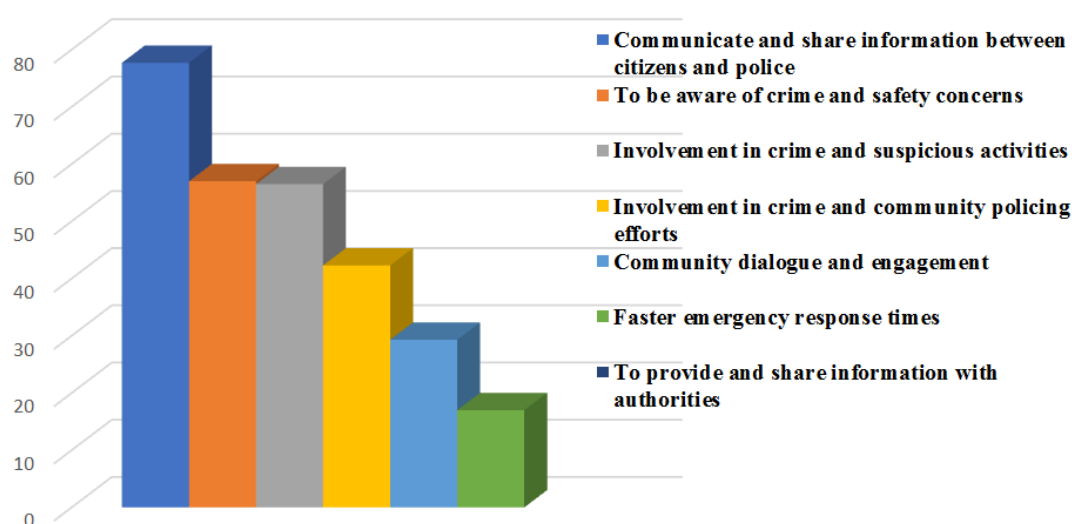Factors that influence citizens to practice Do-It-Yourself through ICT in community policing.

Figure 6. Factors that influence do-it-yourself through ICT.

In summary findings from figure 6 above, results reveal factors that influence citizens to practice Do-It-Yourself through digital platform are; communication and sharing information between citizens and police at 77.7%, To be aware of crime and safety concerns at 57.0%, involvement in

crime and suspicious activities at 56.5%, involvement in crime prevention and community policing efforts at 42.3%, community dialogue and engagement at 29.3%, faster emergency response times at 17.0% to provide evidence and share information with authorities at 11.9%.

Table 1. Gender has no impact on do-it-yourself activities through digital platform in community policing.

Parameter Estimates								95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)	
Sex of respondenta		B	Std. Error	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Male	Intercept	.951	.514	3.420	1	.064			
	Improved communication and information sharing between citizens and police	-.079	.246	.104	1	.747	.924	.571	1.495
	Facilitating citizens participation in reporting rights violations and safety needs	-.078	.209	.141	1	.708	.925	.614	1.392
	Provision of digital platform for community interaction and socialization	-.418	.245	2.911	1	.088	.659	.408	1.064
	Facilitating evidence and information sharing between people and law enforcement authority	.080	.328	.060	1	.806	1.084	.570	2.061
	Other	-.682	.457	2.223	1	.136	.506	.206	1.239

a. The impact of gender on people's activities on digital platform of community policing.

3.4. Effectiveness of Do-It-Yourself Participation on Digital Platform of Community Policing

In response to *"How effective are do-it-yourself activities on digital platform of community policing?"* Qualitative results from focus group discussions show that emerging issues that were standing out throughout the interviews revealed that citizens mentioned that the effectiveness of Do-It-Yourself participation was that citizens would virtually interact with authorities (1) daily (2) weekly (3) occasionally (4) monthly.

To triangulate the qualitative results at wider level, house hold survey findings in Table 2 below, reveal that participants use digital platforms to communicate with authorities on daily basis at 24.3%, monthly at 16 %, occasionally 41.9% and weekly 8.6%.

The implication is that Do-It-Yourself participation is at random and influenced by different causes surrounding personal interests. As such they could be engaged on daily, weekly, occasionally or monthly basis as long as citizens secure their environments. Every individual uses the ICT for security purposes at will as convenience by circumstance whether on daily basis, monthly, occasionally or weekly. This promotes Do-It-Yourself.

Findings are similar to result by Kumwenda [9] that citizens are influenced to survey and monitor their environments with an aim to secure their neighbourhoods.

Table 2. Frequency on use of ICT tools to communicate with law enforcement or other security agencies in the community.

	Frequency	Percent
Daily	105	24.3
Monthly	69	16.0
Never	40	9.3
Occasionally	181	41.9
Weekly	37	8.6
Total	432	100.0

In summary table 2 above reveal participants use ICT gadgets to communicate with authorities 24.3% on daily basis, 16 % monthly, 41.9% occasionally and 8.6% weekly.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

While earlier studies have revealed that ICTs have provided formal and non-formal wide participation that have improved police accountability and transparency in policing, and reducing corruption. This current study reveals that formal and non-formal wide participation that is influenced by citizen's need to communicate and share information between

citizens and police, to be aware of crime and safety concerns, people's involvement in rights violations and safety needs, involvement in crime prevention and community policing efforts, community dialogue and engagement, faster emergency response times and to provide evidence and share information with authorities. The taking of the challenges by citizens to claim for the right to safety through digital platform shows that ICTs have empowered citizens to manage challenges of their time. The implication is that every citizen is capable of engaging in Do-It-Yourself activities on digital platform of community policing as dictated by the security concerns surrounding their situation.

Do-It-Yourself participation is at random and influenced by different causes surrounding personal interests. As such they could be engaged on daily, weekly, occasionally or monthly basis as long as citizens secure their environments. Every individual uses the ICT for security purposes at will as convenience by circumstance whether on daily basis, monthly, occasionally or weekly. Contributory value to research is that flexibility and user friendly of ICTs allowing formal and non-formal wide participation that has improved police accountability and transparency in policing empowers citizens to participate through do-it-yourself participation to secure their environments in community policing. Based on findings the study recommends community guardians including duty bearers like police officers to enlighten citizens to embrace ICTs for more security empowerment to take part in security issues in their times.

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Author Contributions

David Kumwenda: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Mavuto Tembo: Supervision, Writing – review & editing

Chrispin Mphande: Supervision, Writing – review & editing

Vincent Nundwe: Writing – review & editing

Thokozani Andrew Chazema: Project administration, Validation, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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