

# **Government Communication and Political Public Relations: The political dimensions of the central national government communication in Kenya**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Communication plays a critical role in government operations; without a concerted effort government policies, plans, and activities effectively, the operations fail in the court of public opinion. Government by nature is both a public and political entity constituted through a political process and by political actors, this makes the role of communication in government more complex (Horsley & Liu, 2010). The citizens have the right to information, government owes the information, which they ought to provide in order for democracy to take place. Government is the source and repository of all information, therefore its communication takes place in and on behalf of public institution(s) (Bertot & Jaeger, 2010). Governance is a constant exchange of information about policies, ideas and decisions between governors and the governed (Sanders & Canel, 2013). The primary role of government communication is therefore in the service of a political purpose, done on behalf of citizens, with their consent, for public good (Canel & Sander, 2013).

The nature and interplay between political systems, actors, publics and government communication calls for communication that is centered on relationship building and maintenance. Viteritti (1997, cited in Graber, 2003), argued that meaningful communication between government and the people is not merely a management practicality. It is a “political, albeit moral, obligation that originates from the basic covenant that exists between the government and the people” (p. 226). For these reasons, as Leonard et al. (2005) argued, government communication should focus on mutual and long-term trust-building; thus, it should be directed towards building relationships between the government (as the organization) and its major publics, especially the citizens. The citizens should not be impartial and passive spectators, but rather as partners in the creation of meaning and communication (Botan & Taylor, 2004). Such “communication should be examined from the perspective of political public relations, because politics, political communication, and political public relations are inextricably linked together” (Stromback & Kiouisis, 2011, p. 1).

However, government communication is complex because of its political dimension. It is deeply affected by the political environment; thus, it is strongly defined and influenced by political considerations (Appleby, 1973; Pounsford & Meara, 2004). The problem with this is that politics get to influence the creativity in message development (Fitch, 2004; Horsley & Barker, 2002), and increase external influences on government communication (Graber, 2003). Politics plays a critical role in the dissemination of information (Fairbanks, Plowman, & Rawlins, 2007; Hiebert, 1981), but also elevates the need for public support for government programs and initiatives (Allison, 2004; Graber, 2003). The political environment under which government communication operates has forced the professionals to adopt and develop complex communication practices (Canel & Sanders, 2012, p.91). This has led, in some countries, to the appointment of professionals into communication positions based on political party affiliation and not on qualification. In other cases, it has led to the practice of communication for propaganda purposes to influence public perception, by covering up for the political mistakes of leaders as opposed to best communication practices that engage with citizens and enhance the reputation of government (Canel & Sanders, 2012).

In Kenya, the government has strived to strengthen and streamline its communication structures and process. Over the last few years, the government established the PSCU to replace the PPS; closed and re-opened OGS, later moved it to the Ministry of ICT; formed DPC and GAA under the State Department of Broadcasting and Telecommunication to manage all government advertising. The restructuring and formation of these units were meant to create stability and proper structure of communication, to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness. Despite the formation and restructuring, the central national government still operates within a political environment that is managed by political actors; it is a political instrumental at the disposal of those in

power. The political system command and control the information flow, restrict the accessibility of accurate information, and define the extent to which citizens can participate. While there is growing interest in greater engagement and participation among citizens, the government has not been able to hold an effective two-way communication. Such complexities have resulted in citizens questioning the legitimacy and credibility of the government operations. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to examine the political dimension of the central national government communication. The study analysed the impact of political system on government communication in Kenya.

#### **Objectives of the study**

1. Examine the political dimensions of the government communication
2. Determine the impact of the political system on the operations of government communication
3. Establish whether government communication is politically managed
4. Assess the extent to which government communication facilitates citizen participation

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Political Communication and Government Communication**

Government communication involves considerable complexities in terms of goals (Da Silva & Batista, 2007), stakeholders (Liu et al., 2010), needs (Sanders, 2011), and various definitions and resources (Canel & Sanders, 2012). It operates in multi-layered and diverse environments, often must juggle with issues such as what appear to be conflicting objectives set by political masters (Canel & Sanders, 2012). It deals with diverse groups of stakeholders including politicians and citizens. Yet it is concerned with how communication performs its civic functions, and point the way toward shaping public discourse to better serve democratic processes (Swanson, 2000). This means that government should communicate with its citizens to build democracy. Government communication focuses mostly on the role of communication in political processes, it is therefore aligned to political public relations (Swanson, 2000). Political public relations is the process through which organization or individuals act for political purposes, through purposeful communication and actions that seek to influence, establish, build and maintain beneficial relationships with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011).

According to McNair (2007), government communication in politics involves all forms of communication undertaken by politicians for the purpose of achieving specific objectives. The expected outcome is a political result that serves the democratic processes. In an effort to achieve political results, government needs to cultivate relationships oriented towards achieving mutual understanding with citizens who should be seen as interactive actors at the end of the communication process. While Swanson (2000) observed that “the role of communication in political processes and institutions is associated with electoral campaigning and governing” (p. 190), Luoma-aho (2008) recommended that citizens should be involved in the processes instead of merely being monitored and controlled. This means that support and dialogue become more important than control, government, therefore has the obligation of keeping the publics informed and to be informed by the publics, in fulfilling their democratic responsibility. Democratic accountability is enhanced where managers are provided with insight relating to how publics think and react to government decisions (Lee, 2008; Garnett, 1997; Garnett & Kouzmin, 1997). The mission of communication in government should not merely be political, but be democratic and emancipatory in nature (Canel & Sanders 2012).

Communication is a component of the broader government actions, it belongs to the practice of public policy that is institutionalized in government to engage citizens as participants in the democratic process. In order to do this, there is a need to understand how communication is structures and practised in government (Kumar, 2003a, b; 2007). Citizen-focused government communication produces better policies, fosters trust among citizens, enables the government to gain mindshare for its policies, and promotes co-sharing of the ownership and responsibility for shaping policies (Whyte & Macintosh, 2002). It calls for relationship management that is built on upholding of certain values between governments and citizens such as transparency, trust, accessibility and responsiveness (Pandey & Garnett, 2006; Salminen & Ikola-Norrbacka, 2010). Chambers (2003) further argued that communicative processes of opinion and will-formation that precede voting enhances accountability and replaces consent as the conceptual core of legitimacy. Accountability is primarily understood in terms of ‘giving an account’ of something, that is, publicly articulating, explaining, and most importantly justifying public policy. Accountability ensures that democracy is built on the quality of deliberation within the public sphere, the quality of that deliberation is influenced by the extent to which participants have access to accurate and relevant information (Fishkin, 2009a)

### **The impact of the political system in shaping government communication**

The overarching trends that pose challenges for government communication can be understood against the background of the specific features of the political and media systems of the specific countries. The political

structures provide systemic environmental and influential factors that explain the features of government communication in different countries (Hallin & Mancinni, 2004). This section therefore reviews literature on the influence of the political system of government communication by focusing on two different countries, namely: Britain and South-Africa.

### ***The case of Britain***

Sanders (2013) noted that Britain's political system has permitted a degree of pragmatic flexibility in the development of government communication functions that has often occasioned controversy about government public relations, especially during the Thatcher and Blair governments (Sanders et al 2011). According to Sanders (2013), when the Labour party assumed government in 1974, it inherited a communication machinery that had developed since 1945. She identified three essential structural features in the UK government as: The Central Office of Information (COI) established in 1946 under the ministry of information to develop communication campaigns and marketing services; The Government Information Service (GIS), created in 1949, was responsible for media relations; The Prime Minister's Press Secretary that played a central role in government communication, typically the officers were recruited from the civil service (Conservative government) or from a political party though they needed to have a journalistic background (Labour government).

Sanders (2013) found out that during the time of Tony Blair as Prime minister (1997 - 2007), reviews were carried out to examine government communication out of the need for modernizing it, but also as a result of controversies that resulted from the changes implemented by the Labour Party. For instance, the GIS was renamed the Government Information and Communication Services (GICS) to reflect the new proactive communication approach (p. 83). A strategic communication unit was established "to monitor the media and collect data and intelligence, devise and advice on communication strategies, and coordinate communication across government" (Sanders 2013, p. 86). The chief press secretary became the Prime minister's official spokesperson who held daily press briefings. His appointment was seen as a tactic to institute a rapid response to the media (Smith, 2002). After his appointment, the chief press secretary instructed "department heads of information to raise their game" (Sanders, 2013, p. 86). Sanders claimed that the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, went ahead and established communication structures and strategies that were directed at external audiences in a dynamic political environment (Ibid). The communication reforms emphasized on prime minister's publics (Blair, 2007, 2010), and precipitated an unprecedented public, media and parliamentary scrutiny of the structure and functions of government communication.

Sanders established that the restructuring affected government integrity and undermined public trust, spreading skepticism about politics. This is because Blair's government was accused of replacing career civil servants (who had resigned) with staff without media background (HOLSCC, 2009, p. 8). There was increase in political appointees and special advisers that rose from 38 to 70 in the first year of Blair's tenure. The special advisers 'were funded by the public purse but unlike civil servants, many took a party-political line on matters of policy and communication' (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2003, p.50). In particular, the appointment of the "Chief press secretary, Alastair Campbell, and Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell, as special advisers with exceptional powers to instruct civil servants, brought unease within the government and publics" (Blair, 2010, p. 17). For instance, Campbell who accumulated considerable power given his unelected and non-civil servant status, was the Director of communication and strategy, he "headed the GCIS, the press office, strategic communications unit and the research/information unit" (Campbell & Stott, 2007, p.608). Jones (2001) argued that "giving unelected officials such power undermined parliamentary and public accountability; and civil servants' political neutrality was contaminated by partisan politics" (p. 242).

The Blair administration placed emphasis on promoting and coordinating positive messages on government policies which was alleged to cross the line of acceptable civil service practice by straying into party promotion/public opinion manipulation rather than legitimate official government work (Mountfield, 2002). The aggressive use of media as a government communication style was manipulative in the eyes of the public opinion (Barnett & Gaber, 2001). This led to media agenda setting being a "key goal of government communication, building coverage before, during and after actual initiative" (Barnett & Gaber, 2001, p. 102). Media relations was one of the concerns of British government since the appointment of the first Prime Ministerial Principal Press secretary in 1932 (Seymour-Ure, 2003). Press secretaries became a permanent fixture, especially after Churchill's unsuccessful attempt to do without it in 1951 (Kavanagh & Seldon, 1999, p. 57). The importance of media relations is not just a British government phenomenon. The media's prominent role in shaping public perception and their ability to define the symbolic capital of image and reputation are well attested features of most liberal democracies (Stanyer, 2012).

Government communication was seen as a politicization process, since legitimate government communication was perceived as spin doctoring; thus, the presentation of policy to achieve favourable media coverage, whatever the facts of the case, had become more important than policy itself (Ingham, 2003). For this

reason, “the media attacked the Labour spinning” (Powell, 2011, p. 203), but the most controversial issue was Blair’s alleged attempts to persuade the public in the case of 2003 Iraq war (Larrie, 2010). This alleged persuasion provided the ammunition for charges that government communication had crossed the ethical line (Sanders, 2013). The Iraq war controversy reinforced “an already growing distrust in government communication” (Stanyer, 2004, p. 433). The distrust was due to the number of incidents that had happened during the Labour Party leadership which fanned the flames of media attacks on Labour spins. The Blair government was accused of manipulating intelligence information to show that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. The British forces invaded Iraq after the British House of Commons voted to go to war, based on flawed intelligence. The Chilcot report found out that Blair overplayed evidence about the dictator’s weaponry and ignored peaceful means to send the British troops into Iraq (Chilcot, 2016). Blair faced a public backlash in Britain over the decision, despite having led the country’s Labour Party for three election wins, forcing him to resign in 2007.

In the aftermath, Campbell resigned and an independent review chaired by media executive, Bob Phillis, was established with a remit to conduct a radical review of government communications (Phillis, 2004). The report (2004) offered recommendations that were partially responsible for developments in government communication which included: the appointment of a top civil servant to head the newly created Government Communication Network; the strengthening of the civil service Propriety Guidance for government communicators; the reissuing of the Code for Special Advisors; and the creation of the U.K. Statistics Authority as an independent source of information about government statistics. The recommendation by the Phillis report shows the importance of political neutrality as an effective approach in government communication. Political neutrality builds trust in the structures and practices of government communication. The recommendation on the formation of the Government Communication Network was a step towards a more professionalised communication. The Phillis reports also called for the upholding of ethical codes and principles of good practice, and setting of standards of behavior in government communication (Phillis, 2004). When Gordon Brown became Prime Minister, his government implemented the Phillis recommendations, he appointed a civil servant as his Director of communication and official spokesperson. A political principal adviser, and director of strategy, was also appointed, but was a non-civil servant. Brown also employed 78 special advisers despite the controversies surrounding this (United Kingdom, Hansard, 2007); and he did this based on a ‘party-political line’ as opposed to public service practice on matters of policy and communication.

However, in spite of the above lapses, there was a steady increase in investment on communication resources, driven by soaring media demands, growing pressure for transparency and the impact of digital technology. Sanders (2013) reports that Brown’s government introduced the use of digital communities by opening a twitter account and creating a new position called Director of Digital Engagement. The digital engagement role was extended into Cameroon’s administration, who added internet delivery of services and development of the “Networked Nation” that increased citizen-focused communication, and greater centralization of communication structures (HOLSCC, 2009, p. 37). When David Cameron came into power in 2010, he suspended the marketing and advertising activity of the COI and instructed for a review into its future (Sanders, 2013). The civil servant heads of communication were asked to publish their report as per the new government’s twin policy priorities of reducing the country’s deficit and forging a smaller role of the government and a greater one for citizens (Tee, 2011, p. 6). During the civil service platform plan of 2012, a new structure was launched, called the Communication Delivery Board chaired by the minister for the cabinet. It was established to consider cross-departmental communication issues, oversee the Government Communication Network (GCN), and approve the annual integrated communication strategies that were developed through the inter-departmental structures (Hubs). The changes introduced by Cameron resulted in a well-coordinated and specialised government communication, where professionals and government offices worked together for a coherent and consistent messaging.

Sanders (2013) noted that the above changes drove government towards speaking with one voice. The board published the first communication plan, brought together more than 400 government websites into an interactive one stop shop called gov.uk for government services and information (Bracken, 2011). The Government Communication Centre relied on the communication delivery board that was headed by a civil servant executive director who also acted as the head of the government communication profession. Sanders established that the Centre coordinates three support service areas: media monitoring, planning and campaign evaluation; policy and capacity which develops professional standards and training; campaign and strategy which works on strategies; planning and development in the seven hubs. In short, Cameron’s government brought together different communication arms and this ensured that there was a centralised communication system which was open, interactive and engaging. The technological and communication changes saw adjustment towards a communication system that operated in an interactive and participatory manner (ibid).

### ***The case of South Africa***

The history of the political system in South Africa dates to 1948, when the National Party (NP) gained power by institutionalizing racial segregation (Apartheid). Apartheid was characterised by state repression and violence against black South Africans (Maqeda&Makombe, 2013). Nelson Mandela became the first democratically elected president under the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994. South Africa employs a proportional representation system, where a political party is allocated seats according to the number of people who have voted for it (Sebola, 2017). According to Maqeda and Makombe (2013), South Africa is a constitutional multiparty democracy, and organised around three tiers – Local, Provincial and National governments. It has two houses of parliament –The National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces. The national assembly is responsible for monitoring executive performance and passing legislation. The demise of apartheid government saw the liberalisation of the media sector in South Africa. Maqeda and Makombe (2013) established that the print media became an important communication channel for the government, since it gave it the ability to reach mass audiences who are potential voters.

In March 2011, the South African government announced that it would launch a newspaper because it was being misrepresented by the independent media (p. 192). The launch of its own newspaper was a sign that the government was concerned about how the media reports were portraying it while it was not able to control how the media reported government activities and functions (Sowetan, 2011).The government advertising budget was centralised and handed over to the Government Communication and Information Systems (GCIS), due to the negative coverage it was receiving from the media (Maqeda & Makombe, 2013, p. 192). Maqeda and Makombe (2013) established that “before independence in 1994, the National Party (NP) used the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) as a propaganda tool” (p. 193). The SABC, which is a public broadcaster funded by license fee, advertising and government subsidy, would have its senior management leaders appointed depending on political ties rather than professional expertise (Horwitz, 2001, p. 2).

Maqeda and Makombe (2013) stated that just before the elections that brought the ANC into power, the outgoing National Party (NP) liberalised and attempted to democratise the broadcasting industry out of the fear that their major tool for maintaining political power, the SABC, was going to fall into the opponents’ hands (p. 193). On its part, the ANC was worried that it would participate in an election in which the NP had effective control of the SABC. Since that time, the task of ensuring that the SABC board remains non-partisan and free from government interference has always been challenging especially as government continuously comes to the SABC’s financials rescue (ibid).The government and other political actors are always concerned with the power of the media in shaping public opinion. The ANC’s and NP’s concern was with the ability of the SABC in building/destroying the reputation of the political party. Political actors always fear that the media will influence the public opinion, therefore, they will do whatever it takes including changing laws and regulations, for their interests to be represented positively by the media. In 1995, Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, formed a communication taskforce (Comtask) to review the relationship between “government communication functions at national, provincial and local levels” (GCIS, 2002a, p. 2). The Comtask report recommended the development of a professional communication unit within each ministry and a centralised communication service agency, which today is called the Government Communication and Information Service (GCIS). In 2001, the government met with editors and senior journalists to improve on their media relations. Their meeting conceived the Presidential Press Corps (PPC) that was aimed at providing easy access for the media to the President, ministers and senior government officials for accurate and up-to-date information for journalists (GCIS, 2002b).

Maqeda and Makombe (2013) discovered that the project kicked off on a negative note, however, when part of the security clearance required the journalists to provide their sex and bank account details (p. 197). This provoked an uproar and concern that the government was trying to obtain personal information for sinister motives, hence the minister of intelligence was compelled to apologise (ibid). Even though the PPC was supposed to improve communication and enhance media reporting, there was the feeling that PPC would be used by the government to manipulate the media (SADC Media Law, 2003, p. 6). Consequently, the PPC never took off because of the suspicions between the government and the journalists. Maqeda and Makombe (2013) argued that even though the media and political actors, including the government, always had a symbiotic relationship, the media viewed government communication as politically biased and did not trust them (p. 197).

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

This study used a case study research methodology for data collection and analysis. The researcher chose the case study methodology because it provided an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of government communication in a real Kenyan context. Case study methodology allowed the researcher to assume that the reality about government communication is constructed inter-subjectively through meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially by the professionals in government communication offices. The case study provided a rich holistic description that illuminates one’s understanding of the central national government communication in Kenya. The researcher used interviews and

questionnaires to collect data. Purposive sampling was used in selecting all government communication professionals in the three communication units. Purposive sampling is the selection of subjects or elements that have specific characteristics or qualities and eliminates those who fail to meet these criteria (Wimmer & Dominick, 2004). The researcher distributed 67 questionnaires and conducted 10 interviews within the ministry of ICT including the Directorate of Public Communication (PC), Directorate of information services (IS), and Directorate of GAA. The interviews were also conducted at the Office of Government Spokesperson, and, the Presidential Strategic Communication Unit.

#### **IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

##### ***Political dimensions of government communication in Kenya***

The study findings reveal that 59.7% (n=40) said that the nature of government communication is politically oriented, while 35.8% (n=24) said that it is both politically and public oriented and 4.5 % (n=3) said that it is public oriented. The findings from the interviews indicated that those who are career civil servants (4 out of the 10 interviewees) felt that government communication was public oriented, those who were employed as communication consultants (4 out of the 21 interviewees) said it is political, while seasoned public servants (2 out of the 20 interviewees) felt it is both political and public oriented. These findings imply that government communication is both public and politically oriented; the appointees, recommended and headhunted may have been recruited for political interests, and, the selected may be civil servants whose communication serves the citizens. Such diversity and complexity may result to led to uncoordinated and inconsistent communication. There should be a clear division between the selected, appointed and recommend, such that their roles are defined and tasks differentiated in a way that unifies and coordinates strategic communication.

Government is a public institution that is constituted by the citizens consent and charged to enact the citizens will. Government communication is directed to the citizens, played out in public space, for public good and subject to public scrutiny. It considers diverse and segmented group of stakeholders including politicians, minority groups and regulatory bodies. Government communication operates in a political environment that takes into account the interests of the political actors, events and culture that more often determine the structures, resources, personnel and goals of government communication. Meaning, government communication is multilayered and complex in terms of its definition needs, audience, structures and resources.

When asked about the functions of government communication, 47.7% (n=31) of the respondents said it performs administrative functions, 30.8% (n=20) said it does advisory function, while 15.4% (n=10) said it does ceremonial function, 6.2% (n=4) said they do executive functions. However, the findings from the interviews showed that most communication professionals play the advisory role. Interviewee three said *“As much as our work is guided by the owner of the voice, we are there to provide our expert advice, the owner then has a choice regarding the actions. We play the advisory, the executive has a choice to take our advice or not”*. On one hand, Interviewee two said *“In an ideal situation, the role of communication officers at the ministries should be advisory but due to structural challenges, most communication officers at the ministries (apart from the consultants) report to, and are evaluated by, the MDAs who have a poor understanding of the role of communication”*.

On the other hand, Interviewee one said *“The nature and understanding of communication in government is in such a way that communication comes into play only during a crisis and publicity. Even then, they are called upon to play administrative roles of media relations and crisis communication, and not advisory”*. Interviewee six added that *“The role of communication is poorly understood, and not clearly defined, therefore most communication officers end up doing administrative work, more of personal assistant and publicity clerks. As a result, the communication officers have been placed in one category - journalists”*. Interviewee one claimed that *“There is need to streamline the role of communication in government and improve on job descriptions of the communication professional so that they can work in a structured and standardized manner”*. These findings suggest that there is a lack of clear understanding of government communication, its functions and importance. Communication enables government to be impartial, transparent and accountable, as well opens ways of engaging and allowing citizens to participate in the governance process. When government communication is considered to have a strategic significance, it will define the long-term goals, structures, coordination and planning based on research and assessment.

When asked about the structure of government communication in Kenya, 35(56.5%) described government communication as communication that is oriented in pursuit of short-term or medium-term goals, 24(38.7%) described it as communication positioned at senior management levels, 22(35.5%) said it was positioned on the lower level, 10(16.1%) said it permits proactive dialogue in pursuit of long-term goals, while 6(9.7%) said there is specialised communication. Table 1 shows the findings on the structure of government communication in Kenya.

**Table 1: Structure of Government Communication**

Characteristics of Government communication	Responses	Percent
Positioned on a lower level	22	35.5%
Oriented to the pursuit of short/medium-term goals	35	56.5%
Positioned at senior management levels	24	38.7%
Substantial development of specialized communication units	6	9.7%
Proactive dialogue in pursuit of long-term goals	10	16.1%

However, Interviewee eight opined that “*Since President Kibaki’s regime, the government hires consultants and advisors to help it address issues on communications. Most of the advisors are hired for political reasons and connections*”.

Interviewee five claimed that they are hired for tasks which communication officers can do and which they eventually do, though the advisors are the ones who end being paid hefty fees. The interviewee further pointed out that the advisors who are appointed by the CS came in at very high job grades. In support of these views, Interviewee six argued that “*Communication officers hold junior positions due to political appointment of officers into higher job levels than the civil servants*”. The findings on the existence of the two categories of government communicators imply that there was interference by those in power/leadership who appoint “their officers” to work as communication officers for the same job description assigned to the PCOs within the ministries. These findings are an indication there could be conflicts, disharmony, and political interference in government communication. The existence of the two categories of communication officers could also result in demoralization and demotivation of the civil servants who do the majority of work at lower pay than the consultants.

Further findings indicated that government communication is characterized by a lack of or inadequate budgets, which make it difficult to function, and by lack of coordination between communication offices and inconsistent messaging. Interviewee nine claimed that, “*The MDAs have formally been requesting for PCOs, but to meet the demand it would call for more staffing into the requested cadre. This is because most PCOs have stagnated in one position for a longer period, therefore some of the job levels do not have qualified officers*”. In support of the claim, Interviewee one gave an example whereby the Ministry of ICT has only one PCO at job group S (Director) against a variance of 21, still, other PCOs in lower job groups are soon retiring or leaving civil service. These responses are an indication that government communication is characterized by the pursuit of short/medium-term goals that mostly emanate during crises; strong political influence; limited specialized communication units; positioned at lower organizational levels. Government communication is considered to be a tactical tool rather than a strategic tool. The lack of planning and updated database of the kind of workforce government has is an indication that there is still lack of accountability and transparency in the recruitment and appointment of professionals.

**Political system and the structures of government communication**

When asked about the recruitment process for communication positions in government, 61.2% (n=41) said they were recruited through a competitive selection process, 17.9% (n=12) said they were appointed, 11.9% (n=8) were recommended, and 5.9% (n=4) were headhunted. Findings from the interview indicated that the those interviewed at the OGS and PSCU were both appointed, at the ministry of ICT all are civil servants except for Principal secretary and Information secretary. Interviewee two said “*The career servants are those that were recruited through selection, most seasoned career servants are those that are recruited either through recommendation or headhunted as consultants but later selected into certain job groups with govenremnt, such professionals are civil servants but also work for private sector*”. Interviewee five said that “*The last group are those that are appointed, they are recruited by government officers in the senior positions such as Cabinet Secretary, Principal Secretary or the President. They are brought in as political appointees, and sometimes their tenure of working in government ends with the political cycles, tohugh some of them, find their way into govenremtn offices even after elections*”. The study found out that the staff establishment of communication professionals in government were varied. At the ministry of ICT, they were as follows:

**Table 2: Establishment within the MDAs**

Job Group	S	R	Q	P	N	M	Total
In-post	1	26	5	3	15	25	75
Male	0	12	4	3	11	14	44
Female	1	14	1	0	4	11	31

Staff Establishments	22	40	34	41	33	43	213
Variance	21	14	29	38	18	18	138
Officers recommended for upgrading	17	3	3	8	21	-	52

The findings in Table 1 indicate that there was one officer in job group S, which is the highest job group and at the level of Director. Twenty six (26) officers were in job group R–Deputy Director level, five were in job group Q-Senior Assistant Director of Public Communications, three were in job group P-Assistant Director of Public Communication; 15 in job group N-Principal Public Communication Officer; and 25 in job group M–Public communication Officer. These findings imply that there was only one officer at job group S, and this is because at this level the officer is expected to be the Head of the Public Communications Division at the Ministry of ICT, and he/she reports to the Information Secretary. The officer oversees the professional, administrative, and operations of public communications at the Ministries/Departments. He/she is responsible for the deployment of PCOs; succession planning as well as ensuring training and development of PCOs. The findings also indicate that there were variances in all job groups. In total, the government had a variance of 138 communication officers to various levels. These imply that government did not have enough public communication officers to be posted in all the ministries and departments.

The findings on the staff establishment at Office of Government spokesperson were as follows:

*Table 3: Establishment of Communication Staff at OGS*

Gender	Staff members
Male	4
Female	2
Total	6

The OGS staff establishment is also defined by the same scheme of service as that administered by the PS, Broadcasting, and Telecommunication, in conjunction with the PSC and consultation with the PS, Public Service. The researcher was not able to establish the job groups of the communication staff in OGS, due to the structural changes that were taking place. During the data collection, the OGS was in the process of restructuring. However, the study established that there were four male and two female communication officers at OGS.

The findings on the staff establishment at Office of Government spokesperson were as follows:

*Table 4: Staff Establishment at PSCU*

Job Group	S	R	Q	P	Total
In-post	1	1	5	47	54
Male	0	0	3	29	32
Female	1	1	2	18	22

At the PSCU, the study found out that there was one staff at job group S, one at group R, five at job group Q, and 47 at job group P. The structure of the PSCU is defined by the Executive Office of the President structure (EOP, 2013). The EOP is the President’s Front Office and is headed by the Chief of Staff. It consists of Senior Advisors whose role is to advise the President on the performance of his mandate. The office is organized by the wishes of the incumbent President and is directed by staff chosen by the President. The tenure and durability of an Executive Office Advisory position are dependent upon its usefulness to the President. The Senior Advisors counsels the President in such matters as may be directed. Upon the president’s request, the Senior Advisors provides the President with requested information, and the President condense and summarize it for his or her use. Senior Advisors are Heads of their respective offices and are supported by a core team of staff, including; Directors, Technical Officers, and interns (EOP, 2013). In this case, the Head of the PSCU was the advisor to the president on matters of communication, and worked with a total of 54 staff members, including Secretary of communication, five Directors and 48 technical officers.

***Extent to which government communication facilitates citizen participation***

The study findings on the effectiveness of government communication channels were as follows: 27(40.3%) said the government had effective communication channels, 18(26.9%) said the communication channels were somehow effective, while 18(26.8%) said the channels were not effective.



Table 5: Effectiveness of Communication Channels

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Effective	1	1.5	1.6	1.6
Effective	26	38.8	41.3	42.9
Somehow Effective	18	26.9	28.6	71.4
Not effective	11	16.4	17.5	88.9
Not effective at all	7	10.4	11.1	100.0
Invalid response	4	6.0		
Total	67	100.0		

The interview findings revealed that the government did not have effective and efficient communication channels. Interviewee ten said, "Currently, government communication channels are Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), Kenya News Agency (KNA), Mygov newspaper supplement, and MDA's websites". He pointed out that, "These channels are inadequate in communicating information and agenda; there is a need to find other channels of communication within government. Government should consider abolishing subscription fees for Kenya News Agency content in the spirit of Article 35 of the Constitution on access to information". In agreement, Interviewee one added, "Apart from Head of MDAs providing periodic progress reports via government media center, Public Communication Officers should be given status and authority to release select information to the public". She further claimed "The Central Media Services needs to be re-established and equipped to serve as a library for government speeches, circulars, reports, policy documents, press releases, research studies, and any other data materials about government". These findings imply that there is a need for modernization, restructuring, rebranding, and revamping of the communication channels. The government needs to optimize its capacity through the communication apparatus that is supported by requisite technologies. In order for the government to effectively propagate its message, Interviewee seven proposed, "Government should empower County Information Officers to act as Spokespeople for their respective counties. They should liaise with the leadership and produce news, features, press statements, and photographs for release to the public as a way of getting out the Government agenda". While Interviewee three suggested that the "Department's Mobile Cinema Unit should also be re-activated to ensure the content generated by the departments reaches the public living beyond the tarmac, audio-visual media is a powerful channel of communication", Interviewee six argued that, "Information and communication officers need retooling to keep abreast of best practices, and the changing landscape. Also, the government should establish its national newspaper and revamp KBC and MyGov website as the premier outlets for government news and information. Government should further consider establishing a national editorial service to handle all professional editing for government documents".

These findings suggest that the government did not have sufficient communication channels to reach out to all its citizens. It had not adopted the changes and dynamics of the communication environment. The current communication environment offers enormous opportunities for new approaches and methods of communication. One of this opportunity is the increased use of the internet and mobile telephony, that offers creative, cheaper, efficient, and instant new ways for information dissemination and citizens engagement/participation. Therefore, the government communication can adopt new channels such as social media, mobile telephony, websites, and face to face to ensure that government widely and constantly avails information for citizen engagement and participation in the democracy.

When asked whether government involved citizens through effective communication, 17(25.4%) of the respondents said that the government involves its citizens, 18(26.9%) said somewhat involves its citizens, while 30(44.8%) said the government does not involve its citizens. But the findings from interviews with key informants indicated that government did not involve citizens in its communication, instead, communication was conducted on the assumption that government understands the citizens' needs even without engaging them. Interviewee three explained that, "I look at government as an organisation, ministries as departments, the president as the CEO, and ministers as the HoD of departments, the citizens are the clients. Therefore, government operations should be geared toward meeting the clients' needs and concerns". According to Interviewee eight, "Communication plays a key role in involving the citizens, thus, the reason why it should be positioned in a strategic place. Communication should be at the vantage point to coordinate from the center and not at the periphery". While interviewee four noted that, "Government philosophy is that it exists on the goodwill of the citizens. To sustain the goodwill, government must consistently tell the citizens what it is doing for them. That duty must be well planned, executed, and evaluated", Interviewee three said, "The professionals charged with the responsibility to tell government story are frustrated. There is a need for a firm policy on how government communicates with its people, the level of involvement and engagement, the communication channels, and the designated office/persons to do it". Citizen involvement should be anchored on a policy framework that advocates for systematic continuous engagement and participation. Interviewee nine claimed, "A

*unified and harmonized structure of communication will empower Information and Public Communications Officers to communicate with the public even at the regional level”.*

These findings imply that lack of research and environmental scanning by the government had resulted in ineffective government communication. These are an indication that citizen needs and concerns are not part of decision-making and policy formulation, instead, government sets its agenda through the media. The lack of involvement and participation of citizens in government decision/policy making is also an indication of a lower democratic index. It also implies there is ineffective and insufficient two-way communication, lacks transparency and accountability. Citizens' involvement and participation determine the level of transparency and governance and define the democratic index of any given country.

The study findings on the role of communication in policy-making process indicate that 14(20.9%) of the respondents said that communication informs the policy making formulation, 21(31.3%) said it somehow informs, while 32(47.8%) said it never informs the policy-making process. The findings from the interviews revealed that communication does not inform policy formulation due to funding and budgeting challenges. Interviewee three gave an example, *“The Communication officer do not have budget allocation to implement communication plans in MDAs, thus, they rely on administrative budgets in MDAs. In addition to the challenges of funds for research, government communication is faced with serious staffing shortages that they may not have the capacity to conduct research that informs decisions and policies”.* The ideal policy making process requires the collection, management, and evaluation of multiple data, that may take time and various resources. Interviewee two said, *“Most of our communication department does not have resources for management, and evaluation of multiple data. Unless the staffing levels are improved, the communication function may not be fully achieved. Most communication departments are running at half capacity with an aging workforce whose attrition is very high”.*

## V. DISCUSSION

Democratic advocates for a deliberative society in which ordinary citizens participate in political discussion and debate, the deliberation forms the core of legitimate decision making (Bohman, 1998). The deliberation should be determined by the extent to which participants have access to accurate and relevant information; and have equal consideration (Fiskin 2009a). Government should provide channels and environments through which citizens can deliberate and interact; because communication inform citizens, sets the agenda and define the public discourse (Dahlberg, 2007). However, government communication in Kenya does not involve its citizens, it has ineffective and inadequate communication channels. The study found out that politics restricts the accessibility of accurate information, defines the extent to which citizens can participate in the deliberations, and is a hinderance to equal participation. Politics is at the core of defining the operations, functions and appointments in government communication in Kenya. Holtz-Bacha (2007a) confirmed that government communication remains a political instrumental at the disposal of those in power (p.55).

The study findings indicated that the appointing authorities in government communication determine who occupies the two offices, and the extent of their influence. The appointing authority has the power to shape government communication in their own way, determine the structures and reporting lines of the appointees, influence the amount of resources and budget, and define the roles assigned to the officer. As much as some of these appointees have the necessary qualification and skills needed for the jobs, the researcher was unable to access further details on the process of these appointments and their performance in these jobs. The above findings are a confirmation of the complexities and political influences in government communication. Falsca and Nord (2013) argued that the complexities and different interests are not isomorphic, such changes may lead to fragmented communication. Similar appointments were done in South Africa where the CEO of GCIS and Government Spokesperson was appointed by the President. This appointment was aligned to political ties between the President and the appointee. In Britain, the appointment of the Chief Press Secretary -Alastair Campbell and the Chief of Staff - Jonathan Powell as special advisers was done by the Prime minster. The chief Press Secretary was given exceptional powers to instruct civil servants (Blair, 2010, p.170). The Press secretary occupied the central role in government communication, and typically was recruited based on the political party connection (Seymour, 2003). The political actors constantly push the envelope for their own interest and that of political parties (Holtz-Bacha, 2007a).

The findings confirms that the political systems in existence has an impact on government communication. The political actors shape and determine the structures, determine who occupies the office, influence the amount of resources, budget, and define the roles assigned to the officer. The political interference has restricted the accessibility of accurate information, defined the extent to citizens participate and hindered the deliberation process. As a result, communication has been practiced for publicity, propaganda, as opposed to the best government communication practices. In order to adapt to the political environment, government communication should be professionalized, its communication be centered on free and equal deliberation

amongst citizens for appropriate decision making. In order to have an efficient and reflective organization of the communication, there is need for a clear distinction between political and government communication. Professionalisation advocates for well managed communication protected from conflicting interests that infiltrates its structure (Negrine, 2007). It is therefore critical that government communication is re-examined in terms of staff, costs and resources, tasks and functions, strategies and structural issues.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The organisation of the government communication in Kenya is decentralized but lacks central management systems, fragmented and lacks clear structures and defined roles. The fragmentation is not only due to the uncoordinated structures and lack of a unified communication strategy. While the goals of the political appointees are aimed at personal branding, the civil servants aim is to inform and communicate government policies and programmes, on behalf of the government. If the two cadres of communication officers are not strategically merged and aligned to the main goal, the result will be uncoordinated and fragmented communication, that speaks with different contradicting voices. The findings showed that government communication is both public and politically oriented. Government is a public institution that is constituted by the citizens consent and charged to enact the citizens will. Due to its both public and political nature, some of the professionals are recruited through political appointment or selection. The appointees may have been recruited for political interests, and, the selected may be civil servants whose communication serves the citizens. Such diversity and complexity may result to led to uncoordinated and inconsistent communication. There should be a clear division between the selected, appointed and recommend, such that their roles are defined and tasks differentiated in a way that unifies and coordinates communication.

Government communication is multilayered and diverse, it wrestles with considerable complexities that may hinder it from operating on long -term goals. The fact that it operates in a political environment, means that political interests, cycle and culture determine its operations. In such a way that communication professionals may politically be appointed to fulfil the political interest but on short-termism, hence the characterized by the pursuit for short/medium term goals that mostly emanate during crises; political influence; positioned at lower organizational levels. Government communication is considered to be a tactical tool rather than a strategic tool. The communication is politicized and used in promoting the interests of political parties/actors in government

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