



Socio-economic implications of internet shutdown in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Internet shutdowns are measures taken by a government or on its behalf to intentionally disrupt access to digital communication channels, primarily driven by political and national security concerns. Governments put internet shutdowns in place by ordering internet service providers to disrupt their services. This study examines the socio-economic implications of the internet shutdown in Tanzania with particular reference to the Tanzanian countrywide shutdown in the 2025 general elections through the lenses of Network Society Theory, which posits that information flows are the primary drivers of productivity, social interaction, and governance in contemporary societies. The study evaluated the economic, governance, and human rights implications of digital disruptions by drawing on secondary data from academic literature, reports by civil society groups, news media, and international agencies. Data were collected through a systematic literature search conducted between 2020 and 2025. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data collected, and this involved an organisation of each finding with systematic coding and categorization of findings across the sources. The findings reveal that the five-day shutdown during the election period and long-term ban on the social media platform X (previously called Twitter) resulted in direct economic losses exceeding 238 million dollars, affecting internet banking transactions, e-commerce, microenterprises dependent on online markets, and logistics. In addition to the economic expenses, the shutdown weakened transparency of elections, citizen participation, and media and civil society supervision, which emphasized the infringement of the main human rights: the freedom of expression, access to information, and social connectivity. The research also demonstrates that internet restriction driven by political agendas can undermine the confidence of the citizens, create social instabilities, and destroy democratic states. The study concludes that internet shutdowns undermine digital transformation efforts and socio-economic development in emerging economies. It recommends policy interventions promoting legislative protection, digital rights, and resilient infrastructure to mitigate future disruptions.

Keywords: Digital Connectivity, Internet Shutdown, Network Society Theory, Socio-Economic Implications, Tanzania

I. INTRODUCTION

Internet connectivity has initiated a wave of rapid growth that has become one of the most disruptive developments of the 21st century (Nuriev *et al.*, 2024). The internet has become a vital infrastructure that can help in economic growth, governance, education, and social interaction around the world, shifting it away from being a luxury technology (Vermesan & Friess, 2022). The digital transformation has transformed almost every industry, with e-commerce, e-payments, e-government services, and online labor markets becoming the major productivity and innovation sources (Suntsova, 2024). Internet penetration in Sub-Saharan Africa has seen a substantial increase in the past 10 years, with mobile broadband development factors and the rising usage of smartphones (Astuti & Ayinde, 2025). The same is being observed in Tanzania, as the increase of internet access is enabled by the competitive mobile network operators, undersea cable investments, and the national ICT broadband backbone (Mapunda, 2024). Consequently, digital services, mobile money systems, online business platforms, and social media have become part of the lives of people, companies, and government institutions (Raghunath *et al.*, 2024).

Even though the level of digital connectivity is growing, numerous nations have seen cases of internet shutdowns intentionally breaking down access to the internet or the access to certain online services (Shah, 2021). Such shutdowns may be in different forms, making them either a complete shutdown (no internet access at all), partial shutdowns (blocking of certain websites or social media), bandwidth throttling (reducing the speed of the internet to a crawl), or platform-specific (blocking mobile money services and messaging apps). Motivations behind internet shutdowns are usually an attempt to regulate the circulation of information in the election, protest, civil unrest, or national security matters (Bhatia *et al.*, 2023; Stremlau & Dobson, 2022; Fiedler, 2024). According to scholars, the shutdowns begin to be employed as a tool of politics aiming to limit dissent and control the conversation of the population (Chala & Workneh, 2025).

Incidents of digital restriction in Tanzania are indicative of this trend in the world. The internet and communication liberties have had an impact over the years through restrictions, platform-based blocks, and intentional



slowdowns. In the case of elections, particularly the general elections in 2020, cases of social media bans, blocked communication software, and bandwidth limiting were reported (Awinia, 2021). The modification in rules that regulate online content and blogging, as well as online communication, has also contributed to the future of internet use.

Considering the fact that the internet is an important part of contemporary socio-economic systems, any disruption is far-reaching in consequences. Connection facilitates business, access to the marketplace, finances, job creation, and the provision of services to the people. Mobile money services in Tanzania constitute an infrastructure for local business; the internet is used to market small businesses, coordinate supply chains, and conduct international trade. On a social level, the internet provides communication, civic participation, access to education, and involvement in the political process (Asimakopoulos *et al.*, 2025). Thus, any short-term limitations in connectivity, including temporary and partial ones, can derail economic activity, diminish trust, limit access to the necessary information, and restrict the rights of citizens. Also, in situations where digital technologies are tightly integrated with the government and delivery of services, shutdowns will undermine citizen interest and openness (Millard, 2023).

The reason as to why the socio-economic impact of internet shutdowns in Tanzania has been studied is based on the need to comprehend their multidimensional impacts in a fast-digitizing society. The scope of the existing studies is mostly associated with the investigation of countries where the shutdown occurred regularly or on a large scale, so the narrow analysis of the situation in Tanzania was conducted in relation to the experience of digital constraints. Due to the ongoing growth of the digital economy in Tanzania, any disruption poses threats to the economic competitiveness, investment attracted, innovativeness, and social wellbeing. The paper is thus a thorough evaluation of the impacts of internet shutdowns, be they complete, partial, or regulatory, on the socio-economic environment in Tanzania based on secondary evidence.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The internet disconnection has become one of the critical issues in Tanzania, especially at the period of political instability, like the election and demonstrations (Stremlau & Dobson, 2022). Such shutdowns disconnect the flow of information freely and reduce the credibility of the internet as a national communication infrastructure (Chowdhary *et al.*, 2024). The intentional blockage of the internet compromises the digital connectivity when Tanzania is becoming more reliant on the online channels to fulfill during periods its economic, social, and administrative activities.

On the economic front, shutdowns destabilize business activities, curtail online transactions, hamper mobile money services, and hinder market coordination of small and medium enterprises (Otokiti *et al.*, 2022). Numerous businesses are dependent on online marketing that is highly impacted in cases when connectivity is limited. Socially, shutdowns impair interactions between people and groups, limit access to education and online learning systems, and hamper the sharing of timely information (Faturoti, 2022; Cronin *et al.*, 2022). They also suppress the civic engagement of individuals through restrictions on people further interacting with each other (Asimakopoulos *et al.*, 2025), receiving information on elections (Roberts & Ali, 2021), and enforcing their rights in the digital space (Dvoskin, 2022).

The government has responded to the issue of national security and misinformation by temporarily blocking certain websites or limiting internet download speeds (Chilundu, 2023). Such actions are commonly explained by the necessity to preserve peace and control the Internet materials. Although the motive might be to maintain order, the reality on the ground is a push start of socio-economic vital activities and a lot of uncertainty for the citizens, investors, and digital providers of services.

Although the internet shutdowns are on the rise and the evidence of the socio-economic implications of the practice is increasing internationally, the scholarly literature on the matter has not investigated the particular impacts of the practice in the Tanzanian setting. The available literature is mostly regional or continental in nature and does not reflect the economic organization, digital landscape, and social environment of Tanzania. The lack of knowledge regarding the impact of shutdowns on local businesses, employment, digital finance, education, and civic engagement is remarkable. This absence of context-specific data makes it more difficult to determine the complete impact of shutdowns and develop balanced and informed digital governance policies by policymakers and other stakeholders.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To identify and analyze the socio-economic implications of the internet shutdown in Tanzania
- ii. To propose practical and context-specific strategies to overcome the internet shutdown in Tanzania



II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The Network Society Theory was formulated by Manuel Castells in 1996 and it can be considered as one of the basic developments of the modern society, which is being organized around the digital communication networks. Castells is of the idea that the development of ICTs, especially the internet, has reorganized economic and political as well as social systems, with information becoming the chief force behind development (Laskar, 2023). In this perspective, the more societies incorporate digital networks, the more productive innovations come about, and societies are more interconnected than those that experience shocks in digital linkages.

The theory assumes that the modern social and economic organization is based on information and communication technologies, i.e., the work of most institutions, markets, and interactions is made based on continuous digital connections (Dijk, 2021). It further assumes the idea that power in the contemporary world is exercised by controlling the communication networks, thus suggesting that any disruption, whether deliberate or unintended, may have a great impact on the distribution of power and flow of information.

The Network Society Theory is strengthened by the fact that it can specify the increasing reliance of societies on digital connectivity and by the fact that it can be used to explain the impact of access to or control over networks on socio-economic outcomes (Nnanna *et al.*, 2025). Though, it has a weakness to it, as explicitly exhibited by Alfarizi and Heryadi, (2024): the theory is apt to overemphasize technology, and in some instances, it overlooks political, cultural, and institutional forces, which shape digital governance in nations. Also, Laskar (2023) noted that the theory assumes access to digital networks is relatively even, when it is not entirely accurate, as digital divides in developing economies are quite regional, income-based, and infrastructure-based.

The Network Society Theory is very applicable in the context of this study since it reveals why disruptions to the internet in Tanzania because massive socio-economic impacts since the theory supports the reliance of the society on online networks to carry out business, access mobile money, communicate, learn, and engage in civic affairs. Moreover, it assists in understanding shutdowns as a means of network control, which depicts how the limitation of access to digital networks is a means of control in politically sensitive situations, like elections.

2.2 Empirical Review

The empirical research on the topic of the internet shutdowns has gained considerable momentum over the last couple of years, and the focus on the economic, political, and social consequences of internet shutdowns is becoming more prominent. According to Awinia (2021), Internet shutdowns are government-mandated disruptions that restrict access to digital communication channels. Governments put internet shutdowns in place by ordering internet service providers (ISPs) to disrupt their services. Globally, more than 182 shutdowns in 34 countries were recorded in 2022, with Africa accounting for a significant share (Freedom House, 2023). In sub-Saharan Africa, governments often justify these shutdowns as measures to prevent the spread of misinformation or to maintain political stability (Rydzak, 2019). However, empirical evidence indicates that they result in severe economic losses and social disruptions.

In Tanzania, the 2020 general elections marked a first experience of digital restriction. Nyonzo (2024) offers one of the few rigorous evaluations of the impact of shutdowns on the government revenue in the context of Tanzania. The research has compared the 2015 general election, where no lockdown was applied, with the 2020 general election, where social media sites were blocked, using an Interrupted Time Series (ITS) approach. The results demonstrated that the total and tax revenue increased significantly during the 2015 election period but reduced during the 2020 period. This shows that not only do internet shutdowns restrain democratic expression, but also economic performance and revenue generation, consequently influencing employment and national development in general. The analysis thus brings out physical fiscal costs in regard to digital restrictions in Tanzania. On the international scale, Tagat *et al.*, (2024) presented a detailed econometric study that was based on panel data of 92 countries to estimate the macroeconomic impact of internet disruption. They found that a higher probability of a shutdown is linked with a decrease in the Gross Domestic Product [GDP] per capita by 15.6 percentage points, and every single day of shutdown will incur a cost of about 86.58 per person.

To supplement all other economic observations, Oxford Analytica, (2024) reports on the upsurge in shutdowns around the globe, with the year 2023 having the most cases of that nature, and the pattern continues in 2024. Chowdhary *et al.*, (2024) considered the growing number of internet shutdowns in India and conclude that the effects of these shutdowns are severe on the socio-economic welfare, psychological health, and ability to access vital information. Although they observe a recent decrease in the number of the incidents, their analysis reminds us of the necessity of more balanced digital governance that would cause minimal damage to the citizens and economic activity. Equally, Satriawan *et al.*, (2023) examine shutdowns in Indonesia in the 2019 presidential election unrest and Papua Island conflicts. Their research has concluded that although shutdowns can be reasonable under some of the rare occasions, the measures by the Indonesian government were disproportionate and breached the criteria of necessity



and legality and the principles of human rights, among which there was Article 19 of the ICCPR. Additionally, digital commerce and disruption of various industries through shutdowns are also examples of similar socio-economic impacts seen elsewhere.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research design that was adopted in this study was a qualitative research design, which was based on a comprehensive review of secondary data. The design was suitable since the research was instigated to investigate the trends, situations, and socio-economic consequences of internet blockades in Tanzania using existing empirical evidence as opposed to primary data. The qualitative desk-based process enabled the integration, comparison and interpretation of varied academic literature, and online reports to comprehend the effects that internet disruptions have on social and economic structures.

3.2 Data Sources

The research has been based solely on secondary material which has been sourced out of a number of reliable materials in a bid to guarantee depth of analysis and triangulation. Such sources were, Peer-reviewed journal articles retrieved in academic databases: Google Scholar, IEEE, Springer, Science Direct, Scopus, and Emerald. Policies and reports issued by respected international and regional authorities, including the World Bank, International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Access Now, CIPESA, Paradigm Initiative, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), as well as credible news reports and online digital rights surveillance archives, provide information about internet outages during elections and their socio-economic impacts.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through a systematic literature search conducted between 2020 and 2025. The four phases (identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion criteria) of preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) were used. A similar approach was used by (Maluleke & Maake, 2025; Jonas, 2025). The most important search keywords were internet shutdown, digital blackout, network disruption, socio-economic effects of internet shutdown, elections and internet restrictions, and digital rights in East Africa. Inclusion criteria were developed on the basis of topicality to the internet shutdowns and socio-economic effects; and temporality, with first priority to those published in 2020-2025.

The total articles of 205 and 35 reports were obtained in initial search without applying elimination criteria. After removing all the duplicates, the total number of remaining articles was 199 and 30 reports. After reviewing the titles and abstracts only 99 articles and 25 reports were qualified for next selection process. Among these articles, 19 removed on language criteria, 24 articles were irrelevant, 20 articles and 10 reports were out of timeframe. This led to 36 articles and 15 reports that met the criteria for inclusion in this study. Figure 1 below reviews the procedure of the literature search and screening used to obtain final articles and reports.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data collected and this involved an organisation of each findings with systematic coding and categorization of findings across the sources. The analysis was done in the following steps, Familiarization with the collected materials through repeated reading; Identification of recurring themes, such as economic losses, governance implications, human rights concerns, and digital inequality; Interpretation of findings in relation to Network Society Theory, enabling theoretical grounding of observed socio-economic effects. The method helped to obtain a consistent synthesis of evidence and avoid an analytical inconsistency of different data.

3.5 Reliability and Validity Implications

In order to increase reliability and validity, the sources that were given priority in the study were publications of peer-reviewed journals, internationally known organisations, and the existing civil society institutions. Triangulation of data was used in cross checking various sources of information across different economic estimations, timelines and reported impacts. To maintain analytical transparency, the criteria of data selection and the procedures of thematic categorization were well-documented, which increased the credibility of the results.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Since the research was based on secondary data only, it did not require participation of human beings; thus, it had few ethical issues. But, ethical standards were also observed by consenting to credit the foundations of all the



sources by citing and refusing manipulation or distortion of information. Political matters that were sensitive were treated objectively in order to be neutral in the academics.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Overview of the 2020 and 2025 Internet Shutdown in Tanzania.

In two consecutive elections, Tanzania experienced a shutdown of the internet. First, in the election of October 2020, Tanzania banned the use of VPNs, then blocked social media platforms, and finally shut down the internet entirely (Felicia et al., 2020). Tanzania has restricted freedom of expression online for 1 day (24 hours). Human rights groups and observers were worried about this move because they said it hurt democracy and made it harder for people to talk about politics. Because of this, many Tanzanians felt like they weren't able to fully access the electoral information on time.

On 29 October 2025, during the general election, Tanzania had an internet blockade nationwide, lasting until 3 November 2025. It was a five-day and six-hour (126-hour) disruption that included the blocking of key social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok Live, Instagram Live, and X (formerly Twitter). Despite the restoration of overall connectivity on 3 November, social network restrictions and bandwidth capping persisted in several locations. The government never came out openly to explain the shutdown, but the civil society groups and digital rights groups claimed that it was meant to restrict the circulation of information, silence dissent, and shape the narrative at a time of political sensitivity (ACHPR, 2025).

The shutdown is one of the most radical types of internet restrictions, which can be described as a complete blockage of internet services, including mobile data, broadband networks, Wi-Fi, and messaging applications. Internet shutdowns are measures taken by a government or on behalf of a government to intentionally disrupt access to digital communication channels, primarily driven by political and national security concerns (Tagat et al., 2024; United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [UNHCHR], 2022; Kalra et al., 2025). Governments put internet shutdowns in place by ordering internet service providers to disrupt their services (Antonio & Roberts, 2023). These actions are known to be very disruptive to economic, social, and civic life in any given place, especially in the event of elections. Along with that, the frequency of internet shutdowns is rising with every election period, raising significant concerns about economic transactions, freedom of speech, access to electoral information, social connectivity, and violation of other human rights, such as the rights to work, health and education.

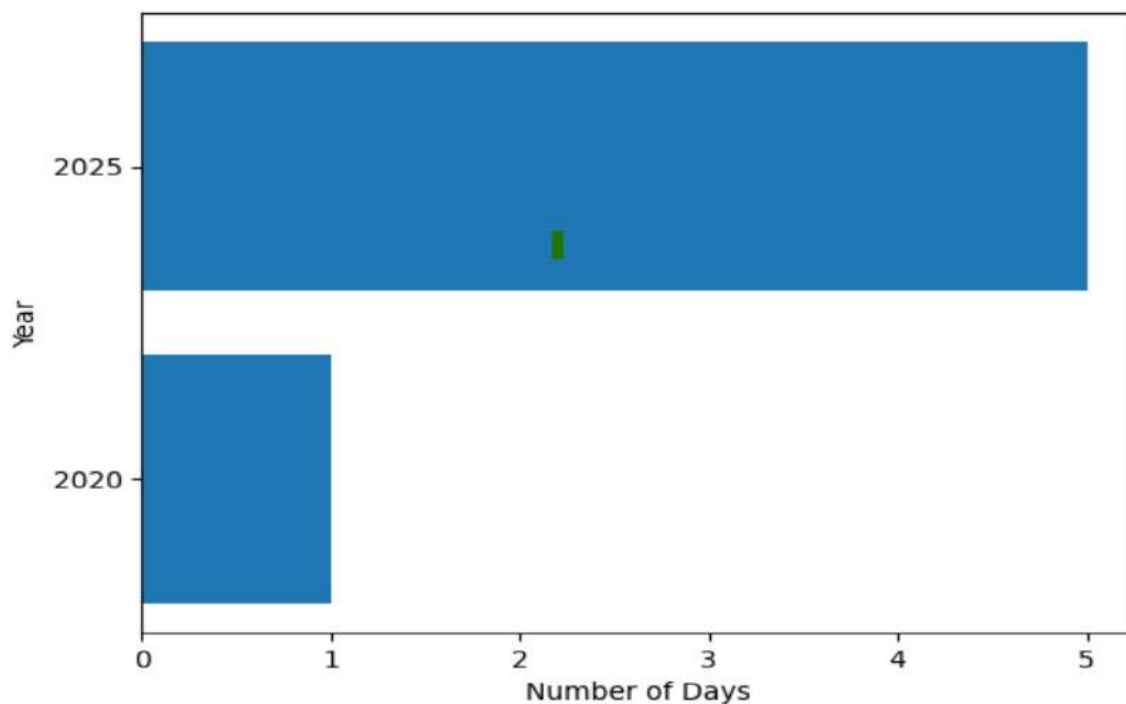


Figure 1

The Trend of Internet Shutdown over Electoral Periods



4.2 Socio-Economic Impacts

The internet shutdown had enormous and disproportionate socio-economic effects on various sectors of Tanzanian society. The five days of internet shutdown in Tanzania that took place during the election of 2025 led to an immediate economic loss of USD 72.3 million (TZS 178 billion), and the long-term inability to use X since May 2025 caused USD 165.8 million (TZS 408 billion) in losses (Paradigm Initiative [PIN], 2025). In aggregate, the overall economic impact was more than USD 238 million (TZS 586 billion), having a negative impact on productivity, trade, digital services, and mobile money transacting. These losses highlight the crucial role of digital connectivity in supporting contemporary economic activities in Tanzania. Rasekhi and Yegdaneh, (2025), support that “the internet is a crucial infrastructure in modern societies, where even minor disruptions can significantly affect daily routines.” Network Society Theory (Fiedler, 2024) also presents us a strong theoretical framework to understand these results: that digital networks shape how modern societies work, including how they make money, how people interact with each other, how power is distributed, and how culture is shared. In this context, access to digital networks is not optional; it is essential.

Tanzanians live in modern societies where digital networks shape their lives in terms of how to work and interact. The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) reported an increase in the use of network devices in the quarter ending September 2025. The penetration of smartphones increased to 39.53%, and feature phones also increased to 86.53% in September 2025 (TCRA, 2025). Table 1 illustrates the penetration of various operators’ networks. As of September 2025, Tanzania's telecommunications sector has achieved a key milestone, with active subscriptions increasing to 99.3 million (TCRA, 2025). This achievement signifies a major shift that is fostering commerce, innovation, and social empowerment throughout the country. Furthermore, the growth has been overwhelmingly concentrated in the mobile sector and is fundamentally changing the way Tanzanians live and work, prompting the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) to laud the digital expansion.

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs), workers in the informal sector, and digitally dependent micro-entrepreneurs, the economic burden of the shutdown was disproportionately borne by these groups since many of them are daily transaction-dependent on the internet to generate income. City-based companies were directly impacted with disruption to e-commerce, logistics, internet banking, and digital payments as well as informal traders and mobile money agents especially in the peri-urban and rural regions with the loss incomes through stalled remittances and disrupted mobile financial services, such as Nala. To employees in the informal sector, where a daily income is frequently received, any temporary failure of connectivity was translated into a high degree of livelihood insecurity.

The shutdown also affected gendered impacts since women overrepresented in small-scale trading, mobile money services, and home-based digital enterprises were affected by shutdown. The access to other communication mediums was also limited; hence, limiting economic participation and social support of women. The shutdown exacerbated the existing digital inequalities in rural settings, where people already lacked access to the internet, and they were further isolated and excluded due to the shutdown, which lacked communication about the markets, during emergencies, and the provision of services compared to the urban centres.

Other than economic effects, the shutdown had extended social effects. It suppressed the freedom of expression, access to important civic and electoral information, and interrupted communication across family and community. These impacts added to the already existing social and economic disparities and solidified the position of already marginalised groups (Millard, 2023).

The results are in line with those of Tagat et al. (2024), who suppose that the internet shutdowns lead to quantifiable decreases in GDP, employment, and investment. In the same way, Nyonzo (2024) found that internet blockage during the 2020 elections in Tanzania had a negative effect on government revenues, highlighting the fact that the fiscal effects of shutdowns extend significantly. The internet shutdown of 2025 restates the idea that even short-term disruption can cause substantial economic expenses, with results disproportionately distributed between the industries that are highly dependent on real-time communicational tools.

**Table 1***User Devices Attached to Operators' Networks*

DEVICE TYPE	NUMBER OF DEVICES	PENETRATION PERCENTAGE
Mobile Phone/Feature phone	58,850,493	86.35%
Smartphone	26,937,478	39.53%
Handheld	1,525,926	2.24%
Modem	743,376	1.09%
Tablet	544,888	0.80%
WLAN Router	373,762	0.55%
IoT Device	175,129	0.26%
Module	87,943	0.13%
Dongle	87,025	0.13%
Portable(Include PDA)	51,874	0.08%
Connected Computer	13,490	0.02%
Wearable	12,532	0.02%
Vehicle	8,539	0.01%
Device for the Automatic Processing of Data (APD)	4,270	0.01%

4.3 Human Rights and Freedom of Expression

The empowering nature of the internet should never be seen as a threat but as an enabling tool for fundamental rights, as entrenched in the International human rights instruments which the Tanzania government is a party to and the Constitution of the Republic of Tanzania. Article 18 of Tanzania's Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive, and impart information. Despite the entrenchment of freedom of expression and other related rights and freedoms in the Constitution, they are currently imperilled by the government's crackdown actions.

The online cut in the communication freedom and right to information that was entrenched in the national as well as international human rights law, such as articles 9, 19, and 22 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, was highly undermined by the internet shutdown. The citizens, press, and civil society groups were significantly hindered in access to real-time election reports, surveillance of security-related cases, and recording of any possible human rights abuse. It was reported that the security forces employed excessive force in protesting, leading to a number of people losing their lives, and the shutdown made it impossible to report and verify such abuses in time (Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa [CIPESA], 2025).

The digital rights organizations such as Paradigm Initiative, CIPESA and GNI criticized the shutdown as an infringement of constitutional rights and international standards. They pointed out that credible elections, civic participation, and protection of human rights are impossible without internet access and noted that those limitations only increase social tensions and decrease the trust of people in democratic procedures (CIPESA, 2025; Global Network Initiative [GNI], 2025).

The ACHPR (2025) report indicates that internet shutdowns constitute a violation of Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which guarantees individuals the right to receive information, as well as the right to express and disseminate information. Furthermore, Principle 38 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa specifically provides that "States shall not interfere with the right of individuals to seek, receive and impart information through any means of communication and digital technologies, through measures such as the removal, blocking or filtering of content, unless such interference is justifiable and compatible with international human rights law and standards," and further that "States shall not engage in or condone any disruption of access to the internet and other digital technologies for segments of the public or an entire population." The report calls upon the Government of Tanzania to exercise its duty of protecting human rights in the country by ensuring that the citizens' right to freedom of expression and access to information is respected and protected.

4.4 Governance and Electoral Implications

A major challenge has been the government's practice of shutting down internet access and blocking social media platforms during and around election periods. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) has condemned these actions as a violation of the right to access electoral information. The international organizations, such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), emphasized that continuous internet connectivity is essential to free, fair, and transparent elections and urged the government of Tanzania to abide by the regional human rights principles (ACHPR, 2025).

The slapstick nature of internet shutdowns in Tanzania is indicative of the tendency of states to assert control over internet space in times of political sensitivity and casts the issue of accountability and the reasonableness of

restrictions in question. Areas of concern According to rights groups, such practices may provide a source of social instability, distrust among citizens and authorities, and distrust in democratic institutions (CIPESA, 2025).

4.5 More General Implications and Secondary Effects.

In addition to the direct economic and governance impact of the shutdown, there were the indirect impacts on healthcare communication, education, and emergency services. The coordination of services that require mobile data and digital platforms was affected, including vulnerable populations, especially women, youth, and marginalized communities. Among the factors raised by activists was the establishment of information black markets since citizens tried to find other means of accessing news and communicating with others in case of an internet shutdown.

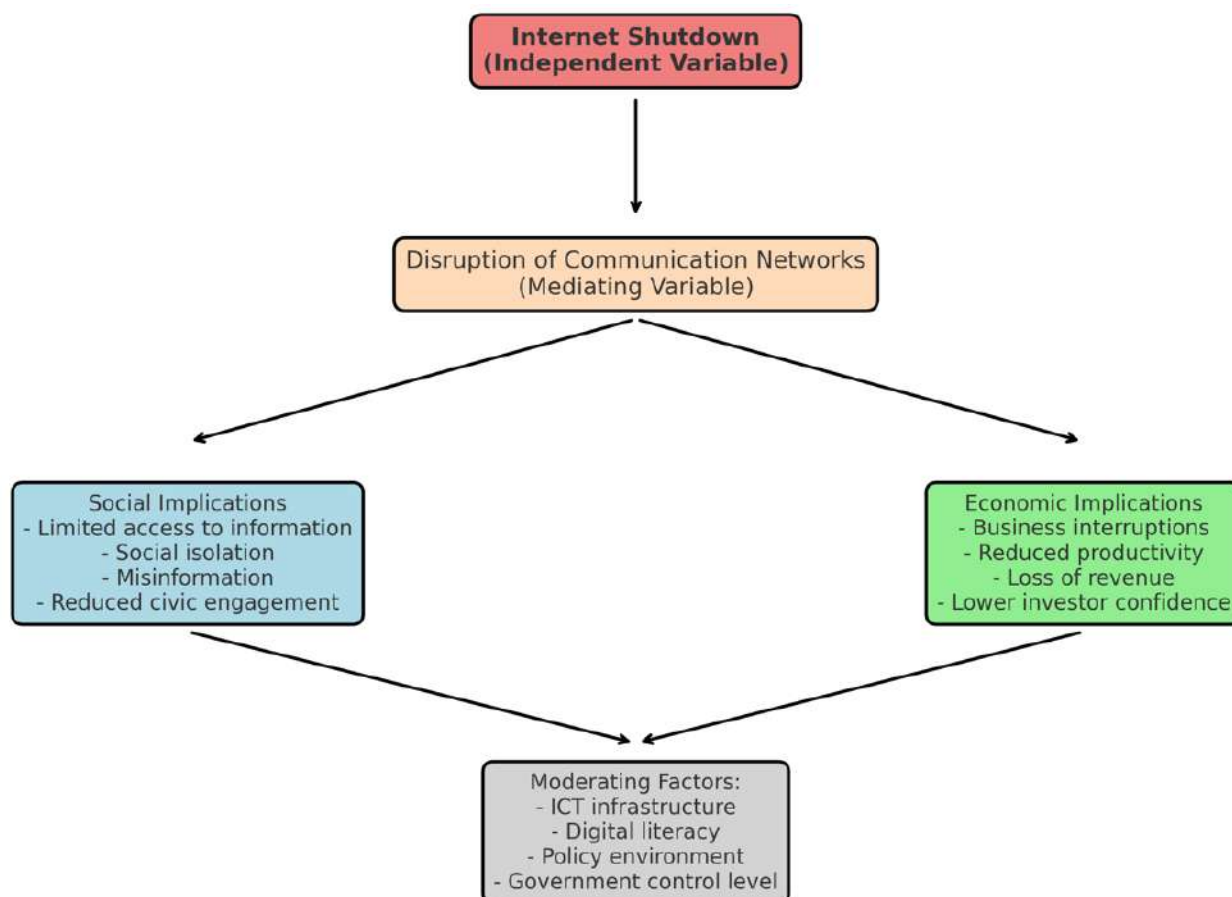


Figure 2
Conceptual Framework

4.6 Theoretical Implications

The Network Society Theory developed by Castells assumes that in the modern societies, power is being instead achieved through the control of information flows and communication networks rather than by the conventional institutional mechanisms themselves. The individuals who own digital infrastructures and information channels in a networked society have great informational power hence they can influence discourse of the masses, economic activity and political involvement. The timed internet shutdown in the 2025 elections in Tanzania, exemplifies a good empirical example of these hypothetical propositions.

The results reveal the nature of network control that the state exerted by cutting off internet access on the purpose of blocking major social media or locking down important social media sites. The blocking of communication networks at a time when political issues were sensitive ensured that the citizens, opposition actors, journalists and civil society organisations were restricted in their ability to communicate and organise themselves. This goes in line with Castells argument that being out of networks means being out of power since the disconnected become socially, politically and economically outlawed. Network control in the Tanzanian scenario was reflected in the decline of electoral transparency, limited civic participation and accountability.



V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The internet-based shutdown in the 2025 general elections in Tanzania shows how socio-economically, in governance, and in human rights-wide the disruption of online connectivity can be. The five-day shutdown, combined with the extended shutdown of X (formerly Twitter), cost more than USD 238 million in economic damages to SMEs, e-commerce, mobile money, logistics, and remittances.

In addition to the economic losses, the shutdown weakened the electoral transparency, restricted the participation of citizens, and hindered the media and civil society from watching. This directly impacted the human rights with violations of the freedom of expression, access to information, and right to development being witnessed as they are enshrined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Governance-wise, the shutdown is the politicization of internet restrictions through political instrumentalization that kills public trust, undermines democracy, and increases social dissent. The results are in line with the Network Society Theory, which highlights that networks are essential in the coordination of society, economic activity, and civic engagement. Civil interruption between such networks impacts badly on the activities of the society, as observed in Tanzania.

5.2 Recommendations

In accordance with the findings of the study and the conclusion, the following recommendations are offered to the government, human rights organizations, civil society groups, and internet service provider companies: To safeguard the socio-economy and maintain trust and reliability in infrastructure, the government of Tanzania should analyze the negative impact of Internet shutdowns on productivity, business confidence, short- and long-term financial investments, social implications, and other human rights. Additionally, the government should adopt a no-shutdown policy as part of its commitment to an open and unrestricted Internet. They must address issues at their source rather than resorting to Internet shutdowns.

There should be independent oversight bodies that verify how the government handles network restrictions and make Internet Service Providers (ISPs) publish reports on how transparent they are. These reports would make people more responsible and provide them a better idea of how their access to information is being managed. Furthermore, making the world more open can provide people the power to stand for their digital rights. It should have a human Rights Compliance which should align the policies of internet governance with the international human rights frameworks such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights and the ICCPR, as well as regional policies (ACHPR Resolution 580 on Internet Shutdowns and Elections).

Civil society groups ought to raise awareness among the populace on the socio-economic and political effects of internet blockages and lobby for legal enforcement of online rights. The civil society organizations are required to keep on observing network interruptions and record human rights abuses, presenting evidence to policy reforms and global accountability. Furthermore, Companies ought to establish backup strategies for SMEs and online companies to reduce losses incurred in the economy in case of network breakdowns.

Declaration of Interest

The author declare that he does not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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