AN EXAMINATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE THEORY IN THE CONTEXT OF *BUNGE LA MWANANCHI* IN KISUMU CENTRAL CONSTITUENCY

BY

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DECLARATION

I declare that this Research Project has not been previously presented for a degree at Maseno University or any other University. I have carried out the work reported herein and all sources of information have been acknowledged through references.

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DEDICATION

To Fatma - with so much love and appreciation.

To Ammar - Good health and God's protection as you grow up.

ABSTRACT

Bunge la Mwananchi (BLM) has been in existence for over twenty years and has been used by activists, politicians, and general members of the public to advance their causes. The platform has also acted as an open forum that encourages anyone to initiate a conversation for ordinary people to debate socio-economic and political problems impacting their lives. Despite its existence and potential as a form of alternative information that can shape opinions, researchers and various scholars have only examined the public sphere theory against other traditional mediums such as radio, TV, and newspapers, few if not none has examined the theory in the context of alternative media of information such as Bunge Mwananchi in Kisumu Central Constituency leaving a gap that needs to be filled. This study focused on the examination of the Public Sphere Theory in the context of Bunge la Mwananchi in Kisumu Central Constituency. To that end, this study aimed at establishing the nature of Bunge la Mwananchi participants in Kisumu Central Constituency; establishing the speaking criteria for members during Bunge la Mwananchi debates in Kisumu Central Constituency; and determining the messages/content shared during the Bunge la Mwananchi debates in Kisumu Central Constituency to find out if they are in tandem with the workings of public sphere theory. This study used public sphere theory as its theoretical framework for the purpose of analysis and interpretations of data collected. Public Sphere Theory was proposed by German philosopher JurgenHabermas in 1962. The tenets of the theory include disregard of class, popular concern and inclusivity. This study used descriptive research design. The area of study was Kisumu Central Constituency. To obtain data, the study used interviews and focus group discussions where 15 FGDs and 10 in-depth interviews with BLM chairpersons were sampled. This focused on personal accounts, observations, descriptions and individual insights of the respondents. Purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents for interviews. For Focus Group Discussions, the study used Convenience Sampling Technique. It adopted a qualitative research method in which the interview schedule was used to collect qualitative data from key informants. The qualitative data is presented through descriptive narrative procedures. The study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data collection involved interviewing key informants who are chairpersons, and custodians of a lot of the information related to the management of Bunge la Mwananchi. The data collected is presented through text, narration, and verbatim. The study population comprised of 162 participants of the total population of 1,500 membership representing 11 percent of the population. The outcome of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge, especially on research on media and political communication studies, and civic engagement; it will also help enforce the public participation requirement, which is a provision of Kenya's Constitution under Article 1, where both the County and National governments can consider using BLM as an alternative forum for public participation; lastly, the outcome of the study will be considered as a community mobilization tool in respect to the President's Big 4 Agenda and Vision 2030 Blueprint. The study revealed that BLM allows anyone to participate in its debates regardless of class, age, gender, ethnicity, culture, generation, or social standing, demonstrating that it upholds public sphere theory tenet of disregard of class. The study further discovered that for participants to contribute to the conversation there's a guide to be followed, the discussions are guided by the chairman. Lastly, study discovered that BLM doesn't generate any new information to members rather, BLM's content is largely determined with what is trending in the mainstream media.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BLM   Bunge la Mwananchi

CBD   Central Business District

FGD   Focus Group Discussion

BBI   Building Bridges Initiative

KBC   Kenyan Broadcasting Corporation

ODM   Orange Democratic Movement

CBO   Community Based Organization

KNBS   Kenya National Bureau of Statistics

MCA   Member of County Assemblies

MP   Member of Parliament

KBC   Kenya Broadcasting Corporation

TV   Television

NACOSTI   National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation

CUIDS   County Urban Institutional Development Strategy

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Bunge la Mwananchi: Bunge la Mwananchi (BLM) is a term derived from Kiswahili language meaning Peoples' Parliament**.** In this study it refers to an alternative medium of information emerging from people who come together for critical public discussion on topical, and pertinent community issues and advocate for political or social change in the public spaces such as street corners, market places or under a tree.

Public Sphere: Public Sphere in this context refers to a space where people gather to freely identify and discuss problems affecting the society, and based on that dialogue influence socio-economic and political change. It's a civil arena where public opinions take shape and strong circulation of public opinions can pressure authority groups and limit their actions.

Speaking criteria: In this study refers to the rules governing the eligibility of BLM members; procedures and qualifications with which BLM members must comply with to begin and continue participating in the BLM debates for example, when to speak and when not to; when to ask questions and when not to when to interject or not to and when to challenge the speakers or not among others.

Alternative media: All forms of participatory media that offer an alternative vision to dominant politics, priorities, or perspectives created and run in opposition to what is perceived as a dominant discourse in traditional media, and openly rejects or challenges established and institutional mediums by putting forward alternative approaches that contradict or diverge from dominant discourse in the mainstream media are referred to in this study.

Nature of Participants: In this context refers to the basic and shared characteristics of the *Bunge la Mwananchi* participants such as attendance of BLM forums, participation of members in the forums, age, gender, social status, race, and sex, employment and education status.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Bunge la Mwananchi is a term derived from Kiswahili language meaning Peoples' Parliament**.** According to Pambazuka, (2014) it is an indigenous grassroots social movement that emerged in the early 1990s in response to Kenya's persistent economic malfeasance and misrule, Pambazuka, (2014).In this research, however, it has been studied as an alternative medium of information emerging from people who come together for critical public discussion on topical, and pertinent community issues and advocate for political or social change in the public spaces such as street corners, market places or under a tree.

Bunge la Mwananchi has been in existence for over twenty years and has been used by activists, politicians, and general members of the public to advance their causes. The platform has also acted as an open platform that encourages anyone to initiate a conversation for ordinary people to debate socio-economic and political problems impacting their lives.As much as many studies by various scholars have examined the public sphere theory against other traditional mediums such as radio, TV, and newspapers, few if not none has examined the theory in the context of alternative media of information such as *Bunge la Mwananchi*. This study thus proposed to investigate if public sphere theory succeeds in offering useful insights into the operations of *Bunge la Mwananchi* and if that offer provides an adequate theoretical framework to establish the nature of *Bunge la Mwananchi* participants in Kisumu Central Constituency; establish the speaking criteria for members during *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates in Kisumu Central Constituency, and to determine the messages/content shared during the *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates in Kisumu Central Constituency, so as to find

out if they are in tandem with the workings of public sphere theory. This research was carried out from April 2021 to June 2021.

The public sphere is a space in society where people may openly debate and identify societal issues and, as a result of such conversation, influence political action. "A public debate is a dialogue in which people express their opinions on topics that are important to them. The majority of public discussion occurs in the media, but it also occurs in meetings, on social media, in scholarly papers, and in government policy documents" (Overland, 2018 p. 16).

The term was originally coined by German critical theorist/philosopher Jurgen Habermas first in his post-doctoral thesis titled 'Structural Transformation of the Public sphere* in 1962. Habermas later returned and revised many of the arguments he had in the first study and these were in 1978, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1996, 1997, 2006 etc. However, the book *(The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere)* still remains the most widely cited source for theorizing the meaning of "public sphere."Habermas introduced the public sphere as: ''a sphere which mediates between society and the state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion'' (Habermas, 1974, p. 50). The public sphere, according to Jürgen Habermas' book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, is the conceptual space where private individuals congregate to discuss topics that contribute to the creation of public attitudes, political parties, and movements (Habermas, 1989).

The theory of the public sphere is critical as it explains how the people in a liberal democratic society engage with each other as a result of freedom of expression/ freedom of speech, freedom of movement and freedom of the press (Nyambuga, 2011). The theory postulates how the media influence political discourse in a society and how people become engaged as a result of possible imperfections in the liberal democratic systems in political conflicts within

the state (Nyambuga, 2011). The study of the public sphere centers on the idea of participatory democracy and how public opinion becomes political action.

Bello, and Wilkinson (2016 in Calhoun, 1992; Dahlgren, 1995; Kellner, 2000) argue that there are two major themes in Habermas' book: An analysis of the historical genesis of the bourgeois public sphere, and an account of the structural change of public sphere in the contemporary era with the rise of state capitalism, the culture industries, and the increasingly powerful positions of big business in public life. Habermas provided a historical analysis under which the public sphere emerged and grew as an independent arena of public debate and discussion, focusing upon European bourgeois political life of the 17th through the mid-20th centuries, specific to the societal conditions of Germany, Britain, and France (Bello & Wilkinson, 2016).

Over the years, different scholars have offered different definitions of the public sphere, for instance, Soules, (n.d) considers the public space as made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state. The public sphere, according to Fraser (1990), can be understood as a theater in modern cultures where political engagement is enacted through the medium of discussion.

Asen (1999) regards it as a realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed while other scholars such as Bello and Wilkinson (2016) argue that the sphere is the realm of social life where information and views on questions of common concern are exchanged, leading to the formation of public opinion while Dahlgren (1995) asserts that the public sphere takes place when citizens, expressing the rights of assembly and association gather as public bodies to discuss issues of the day, specifically those of political concern.

The ideology of the public sphere theory Benhabib (1992) contends that it's how the government's laws and policies should be steered by the public sphere and that the only legitimate governments are those that listen to the public sphere. The study of the public sphere centers on the idea of participatory democracy and how public opinion becomes political action.

The Public Sphere theory is based on four essential elements: (i) Every contributor should have an equal chance to start the conversation, ask questions, discuss, examine and propose. (ii) Everyone should have the right to question the determined discussion topics. (iii) Everyone should have an equal chance to declare their wants, desires, and emotions. (iv) Speakers should have the right to declare their statements on the procedures of discourse and the practice of these procedures, and if they are excluded through the discussions, they should have the freedom to express their position and the relations of hegemony which limited their expression (Livingstone,2013et al., p. 28).

This study is based on the need to examine the Public Sphere Theory in the context of *Bunge la Mwananchi* (BLM) in Kisumu Central Constituency. With examples principally drawn from Habermas theory, the study aims to find out if *Bunge la Mwananchi* runs on a similar structure as that of the public sphere. Does *Bunge la Mwananchi* contributors have an equal chance to start the conversation, ask questions, discuss, examine and propose an idea as argued by Habermas(1989) Does everyone have the right to question the determined discussion topics as argued by Bolton, (2005). Does everyone have an equal chance to declare their wants, desires, and emotions and speakers have the right to declare their statements on the procedures of discourse and the practice of these procedures as posited by (Anria, 2013).

In it's an attempt to investigate the key objects, the study will find out if BLM is a prospective avenue where people gather and challenge the government and powers that be by providing alternative thoughts, ideas, and opinions and suggest better ways of addressing the issues of social exclusions, marginalization, and equality. Additionally, the study may answer the following questions: are the operations of BLM similar to that of the public sphere theory? Does public sphere theory define or represent BLM? Are these operations aligned?

However, nowadays, *Bunge la Mwananchi* is open even to the marginalized or oppressed to participate; this may be seen as a sort of popular education and a social movement (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1985 as cited in Hagensen, 2014). *Bunge la Mwananchi*, according to Hagensen, is both an idea and a movement; it is the concept of getting together for critical public debate. It's also a tangible movement of people fighting for social justice, rooted in a mix of vernacular traditions and local and worldwide inspiration (Hagensen, 2014). The movement is based on a Kenyan custom of gathering in public spaces, such as street corners, market locations, or under a tree, to discuss important community concerns (BLM, 2010; Rasmussen & Omanga, 2012).

Graham (2009) defines the public domain as having four normative conditions. The public space, for example, needs people's active engagement in the democratic process. He says that this encompasses not just formal political involvement, such as voting, but also citizens gathering to debate political and social concerns affecting them in their everyday lives (a precondition to voting).

Nevertheless, the cornerstone of the public sphere is this every day, informal political dialogue among citizens. Second, Graham (2009) contends that the public sphere requires independent (that is, free of both state and commercial control) communication spaces in which individuals can freely and publicly engage in debate and political discourse. It's worth mentioning that these locations may be seen from two different angles.

First, they can be regarded from a micro or macro viewpoint (Keane, 2000). At the micro level, communicative spaces may include the local bar, the hairdresser, or a town hall meeting, but at the macro level, they might include national media, and at the macro level, worldwide media. Second, this is where a formal/informal difference might be made. Parliaments, lawmakers, and even e-judges are examples of formal communication spaces, whereas daily communicative venues such as the workplace, cafeteria, shopping mall, or café are instances of informal communicative spaces.

Third, according to Boeder (2005), the public sphere need mass media that is free of both public and private sector control. The media serves three purposes. For starters, they provide a large-scale communication area for public debate. Second, they serve as information transmitters, informing individuals about current social and political concerns. Finally, they act as a "skeptical eye" on governmental and economic issues.

Finally, there is the deliberative process, which is not just the public sphere's leading communication form but also the structural and dispositional arrangements of that process (Graham, 2009). It's worth noting that Habermas (1996) claims that the 'public sphere' cannot be understood as an institution or space, but rather as a 'social space' formed by a deliberative process.

Looking at the arguments presented by the scholars above, it is evident that even though the four elements of the public sphere as envisaged by Habermas have been presented in different words, the objects have largely remained the same. That public sphere is a space where regardless of class, race, ethnicity, status, and social standing, one has the right to an opinion and the right to share that opinion without judgment or discrimination- a space where like-minded persons, not just professionals or politicians gather for pertinent public dialogue. As argued by Boeder (2000, p. 15), in the public sphere, access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private

individuals assemble to form a public body. It is here where the 'heart and soul' of the public sphere can be found and where much focus has been paid to by deliberative democratic theorists.

Furthermore, the emphasis of this research is on the procedure of debate within the framework of common unofficial political conversation (Graham, 2009). According to Dryzek (2000) in Graham's (2009) Deliberation as a social process differs from other forms of communication in that deliberators are open to changing their judgments, preferences, and perspectives during interactions involving persuasion rather than coercion, manipulation, or deception.

It is through deliberation whereby preference transformation becomes possible because participants are confronted with new information, opinions, and arguments, which they would have otherwise never supposed before deliberation under a voting alone account (Graham, 2009). Similarly, Elster (1998) claims that negotiating and voting alone tend to highlight individual choices and reasons, but open debate among free and equal citizens aims to turn individual preferences into a common will based on the common good, (Elster, 1998).

Graham (2009) defines the public space as having four normative characteristics. People' engagement in the democratic process is needed in the public arena. This involves both formal political involvement, such as voting, and individuals gathering to debate political and social problems that touch them in their everyday lives. The purpose of this research is to see if Bunge la Mwananchi has a comparable structure, particularly utilizing instances from Habermas' theory. The media performs three functions. First, they serve as a large-scale communication platform for public dialogue. Second, they provide the necessary knowledge to keep individuals up to date on current social and political concerns. Finally, they keep a "discerning lens" on state's economic issues.

1.1.1   Bunge la Mwananchi

Bunge la Mwananchi is a term derived from Kiswahili language meaning Peoples' Parliament. According to Pambazuka, (2014) it is an indigenous grassroots social movement that emerged in the early 1990s in response to Kenya's persistent economic malfeasance and misrule. Progressive thinkers, human rights activists, and political players began to speak at the Bunge la Mwananchi discussions on a regular basis. "Among the notable personalities is Prof Katama Mkangi, a civil rights campaigner imprisoned by the Moi administration for campaigning for the reformation of civil rights. Others were Prof. Horace Campbell, Prof. Maina Wa Kenyatti of the now-defunct Mwakenya December Twelve Movement, and Prof. Yash Tandon, a public intellectual" (Pambazuka, 2014, p. 8).

Bunge la Mwananchi was founded and is led by people who believe they are denied social justice and appropriate living conditions such as unemployed people, minor traders, squatters, ethnic conflict victims, and low-wage workers were among them(Gacheke, 2014).

The campaign acts as a forum for ordinary people to debate socio-economic and political problems impacting their lives and the general public. It envisages a "Kenya where people possess unfettered freedom to mobilize to free themselves from all kinds of repression and exploitation." *Bunge la Mwananchi* emerged in the early 1990s, during the neoliberal universalization era, after the apparent defeat of African nationalist groups born of the Pan-African battles of the 1960s and 1970s (Gacheke, 2014).

Bunge la Mwananchi received its name in 2003 when the movement held its first election as a parody of the parliamentary elections held in December 2002. These elections represented an expansion of the national space that required freer public discourse and discussion, but in no way hastened the decriminalization of dissent. The association space in Kenya remained limited until 2002, considering the first moves towards a free assembly. It was taken to create a multi-party government in 1992 (Nasong'o, 2007).

Nyongesa (2011, p. 63) contends that "*Bunge la Mwananchi* is the idea of organizing grassroots people around their self-identified development challenges to push for a people-led development agenda is to - formally or informally, in neighborhoods and markets, on the roadside, and under a tree; to dialogue on pertinent community issues." *Bunge la Mwananchi's* practice is a constant dialogue that constitutes an often open-ended 'negotiation of meaning,' in which problems are processed collectively in a dialectical cycle of socialization and construction of knowledge, norms, and values (*Bunge la Mwananchi*, 2019).

Bunge la Mwananchi reflects the surrounding society and repressive systems based, for example, on gender, age, or sexuality, through participating members and, not least, the continual influx of newcomers owing to the open membership structure (Gacheke, 2014). However, in a "war of ideas," such processes are confronted and contested publicly via meditation practice while remaining framed by the core ideals of inclusivity and equality, leading to the growth of radical democratic praxis. As a result, the BLM is said to represent the non-normative nature of participatory institutions or communities. As a result, the Bunge la Mwananchi's essential principles are more process-oriented, and because they are always negotiated, there is also a strongly institutionalized norm of equal access and inclusivity (Hagensen, 2014).

In scholarly studies, Atkinson and Leon Berg, (2012; and Rauch, (2015), regard alternative media in broad terms – media that question existing channels and present alternative methods and viewpoints that contradict or diverge from a prevailing discourse in the mainstream media (Atton, 2015; Leung & Lee, 2014).The term does not require any particular focus. Nonetheless, it refers to any and all forms of media that are developed and distributed in opposition to what is seen to be the dominant narrative in traditional media.

Alternative media are important because their existence and methods of operation have the potential to influence public discourse and the rest of the media landscape, as well as the conditions for opinion formation and news consumption (Holt, 2018).Alternative media are first and foremost understood as participatory media (Sandoval, 2009). According to Downing(2001), alternative media presents an alternative viewpoint to dominant politics, objectives, and perspectives. "Alternative media should establish counter-hegemony, report on neglected topics, and criticize oppression; the role of radical media can be seen as trying to disrupt the silence to counter the lies, to provide the truth" (Downing, 2001, p. 16).

Bunge la Mwananchi has grown in popularity among progressive students, university intellectuals, politicians, workers, peasants, and the jobless since the turn of the century (BLM, 2010). The bulk of *Bunge la Mwananchi* members were jobless or street vendors looking for a place to express and discuss their thoughts on social and political issues with their peers. In general, *Bunge la Mwananchi* meetings were more active during major political events like elections and referendums (Kimari& Rasmussen, 2010). Following the post-election violence in Kenya in 2007, *Bunge la Mwananchi* increased its efforts as part of the multi-ethnic agenda and as a longer-term preventative strategy (Rasmussen & Omanga, 2012). Giving grassroots voices and exposure was singled out as a particularly promising feature of participatory and citizen journalism (Holt, 2018; Domingo et al., 2008).

Today, *Bunge la Mwananchi* is considered an open platform and encourages anyone to initiate a platform (BLM, 2010). Gacheke, (2014. p 11) opines that ''there is nothing more uniquely human than a gathering of ordinary minds, whose membership is diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, cultures, generations, and physical abilities, and cuts across different social groupings and classes. where people gather in an open location on a regular basis for amicable dialogues to critically evaluate political and socio-economic developments''.

McNair, (2015) argues that for more than two decades of political and social turmoil in Kenya, BLM has acted as a platform for activists, thinkers, and ordinary Kenyans to voice their opinions, debate issues, and push for social change (McNair, 2015). His argument is shared by Sishak (2016) who asserts that the people's parliament is an inspiring experience to show how people can build commitment to a different process that aims to change the rules of the game rather than remain stuck in pre-structured frameworks and playgrounds of exclusions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The conceptualization of the *Bunge la Mwananchi* as a public sphere has been advanced by numerous scholars who consider it a public space or an open platform that encourages anyone to initiate a conversation for ordinary people to debate socio-economic and political problems impacting their lives. Scholars have argued that Bunge la Mwananchi is useful in advancing dialogues and in sharing information especially among the marginalized or oppressed to what can be perceived as a form of popular education and a social movement. However, having been in existence both globally and locally for over twenty years and having been used by activists, politicians, and general members of the public to advance their causes, BLM has not been investigated to determine its operations against public sphere theory. Whereas it is agreed by scholars that BLM is a form of a public sphere and many previous studies by various scholars have examined the Habermas theory against other traditional mediums such as radio, TV, and newspapers, few if none has attempted to look at the public sphere theory in the context of alternative medium of information such as Bunge Mwananchi. It's because of this gap that this research aims to examine the Public Sphere Theory in the context of *Bunge la Mwananchi* in Kisumu Central Constituency. The research aims to determine if the operations of *Bunge la Mwananchi* in Kisumu Central Constituency are in tandem with those

of Habermas theory of public sphere. Additionally, the study aims to establish if Habermas' approach succeeds in offering useful insights into the operations of Bunge la Mwananchi.

1.3 Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the nature of the *Bunge la Mwananchi* participants in Kisumu Central Constituency?

2. What is the speaking criteria for members of *Bunge la Mwananchi* during the BLM debates in Kisumu Central Constituency?

3. What constitutes the content/messages discussed during the *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates in Kisumu Central Constituency?

1.4 Research Objectives

This study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To establish the nature of *Bunge la Mwananchi* participants in Kisumu Central Constituency

2. To establish the speaking criteria for members during *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates in Kisumu Central Constituency

3. To determine the messages/content shared during the *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates in Kisumu Central Constituency

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the body of knowledge, especially on research on media and political communication studies, and civic engagement especially in Africa. It is invaluable to researchers and investigators who can use the material to contribute to political communication expertise and give researchers the literature review required to continue analysis. With this study, Scholars and Researchers, can use the findings of this study to add

to the existing field of knowledge of social movement strategies and provide researchers with the essential literature review to conduct additional studies.

The public sphere theory is examined in the context of Bunge la mwananchi in Kisumu's central constituency in this research. As a result, the study findings will help non-governmental groups and government agencies to comprehend Bunge la Mwananchi's role in expanding Kenya's democratic space. The study's recommendations will help the Kenyan government establish better methods for boosting Bunge la mwananchi activities, resulting in more public engagement in nation building.

The study's conclusions will serve to remind the government and non-governmental organizations of the need of creating democratic space among Kenyans. The purpose of this research is to document and enhance the theory and practices of an existing grass-roots social movement in Kenya. The study's findings will be utilized to assess the effectiveness with which the social movement contributes to democratic and social transformation in Kenya.

1.6 Scope of Study

Even though there are several *Bunge la Mwananchi* forums across the county, this study was limited to Kisumu Central Constituency in Kisumu County only. Kisumu County has seven sub-counties, including Seme, Muhoroni, Kisumu East, Kisumu West, Nyando, Nyakach, and Kisumu Central Constituency. This study was situated at the Kisumu Central Constituency because according to Ali Simira, BLM Chairman, it is where many BLM gatherings are centered having started its activities in 1991. The study also preferred Kisumu Central Constituency because according to Kisumu County Urban Institutional Development Strategy (CUIDS) (2018/2019), it hosts most of the socio-economic and political activities in the county; it hosts Kisumu County Headquarters making it the most active part of Kisumu County. Additionally, the population within Kisumu Central Constituency is largely heterogeneous as compared to other sub-counties, CUIDS (2018/2019).However, due to

limited resources, the study was not able to cover this entire population. Therefore, the findings are limited to the unique characteristics of members participating in the *Bunge la Mwananchi* based within this scope as opposed to others. The study was conducted in a period of three months: February 2021 to April 2021. The research was centrally focused on the need to examine the Public Sphere Theory in the context of *Bunge la Mwananchi* in Kisumu Central Constituency.

Thematically, even though public sphere theory has many tenets, this study was limited to public concern, public participation, inclusivity and disregard of class as tenets of the said theory.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study was based on the Public Sphere Theory.

1.7.1 Public Sphere Theory

This study used only one relevant theory (Public Sphere theory) for analysis and interpretations of both the field and library data.

The public sphere is an area in social life where individuals can come together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action. Such a discussion is called public debate and is defined as the expression of views on matters that are of concern to the public often, but not always, with opposing or diverging views being expressed by participants in the discussion. Public debate takes place mostly through the mass media, but also at meetings or through social media, academic publications, and government policy documents *(*Overland*, 2018).

The term was originally coined by German philosopher Jurgen Habermas in 1962. Over the years, different scholars have offered several meanings of the public sphere for instance Soules, (n.d) considers the public sphere as "made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state". Fraser (1990) maintains that the

public sphere can be seen as "a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk'' On the other hand, Asen (1999) regards it as a "a realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed". According to Asen the public sphere theory's worldview is that the public sphere should drive the government's laws and policies, and that the only legitimate governments are those that listen to the public sphere (Benhabib, 1992).

The public sphere is a space that mediates between the community and the state. Graham (2009) defines the public realm as having four normative characteristics. The public realm, for example, necessitates people' active participation in the political process. It also encompasses not just formal political involvement, such as voting, but also citizens gathering to debate political issues. Second, this is where a formal/informal distinction can be drawn. Parliaments, legislators, and even e-juries are examples of formal communication spaces, whereas daily communicative places like the office, cafeteria, shopping mall, or café are examples of informal communicative spaces. Third, the public realm necessitates a free press that is both state and commercially influenced. Three purposes are served by the media. One, they function as a large-scale communicative venue for public discourse, as previously noted. Two, they act as information transmitters, providing the required information to keep citizens informed about current social and political issues. Finally, they act as a 'critical eye' on governmental and economic issues.

Finally, there is the deliberative process, which is not only the public sphere's leading communication form, but also the structural and dispositional arrangements of that process. It's worth noting that Habermas (1996p. 71) claims that "the public sphere is neither an institution nor a space, but rather a 'social space' created by a deliberative process. It is here that the 'heart and soul' of the public sphere may be found, and where deliberative democratic

thinkers have placed a great deal of emphasis". Furthermore, the focus of this study is on the process of deliberation within the framework of common informal political conversation (Graham, 2009). Habermas in McQuail (2005)notes that "access to the space is free, and expression is guaranteed. The space lies between the base and the top of society and mediation takes place between the two". The base, he adds, "can be considered to be the private sphere of the life of individual citizens, while the political institutions at the center or top are part of the public life" (Nyambuga, 2011).

"The public sphere theory is especially important because it explains how individuals interact in a liberal democratic society as a result of freedom of expression/freedom of speech, freedom of movement, and freedom of the press" (Nyambuga, 2011 p. 4).

The theory of the public sphere as argued by Nyambuga (2011) suggests how the media impact political discourse in a society and how people become involved in political conflicts inside the state as a result of possible flaws in liberal democratic regimes. The public domain is a metaphysical rather than a tangible object as constructed by Habermas. It transcends the restaurants and bars, the barbershops, and the magazines it has published. It is a forum for discussion in abstract form. A field of collaboration in which ideas and personalities are conveyed, consolidated, shaped, and translating popular opinion into politics (Boeder, 2000). According to Habermas, the public sphere must follow such structural requirements to operate efficiently. In the first case, it must preferably be positive. It must never be limited to a clique, and access must be as open as possible (Bolton, 2005). Second, the socio-economic class and hierarchies must be overlooked. Even though they are not equal, both participants must be treated as such. Third, individuals must be able to exercise control over their actions and must not be subjected to any sort of coercion. Fourth, the level of interaction must reflect

a shared commitment to logic and reason. The concept of 'communicative action' is at the heart of his theory.

Individuals aim to establish shared agreement and organize action in society in rational reasoning and consensus-building (Bolton 2005). Strategic, normative, and dramaturgical activity are three distinct types of social action that can be distinguished from communicative action. In strategic intervention, the social actor is driven by a desire to achieve a certain objective, as well as maxims and estimates, which are frequently rationalistic in nature.

In public sphere theory, according to Bolton (2005), socio-economic status and hierarchies must be ignored by both; members must be treated equally as much as they are not. Members must also be in command and not be subjected to any form of pressure. Livingstone & Lunt (1994) make similar points, arguing that in public domain theory, everyone should have an equal opportunity to express their goals, preferences, and feelings.

In the first case, it must preferably be positive Habermas (1997); Bolton (2005), When thinking about the public sphere, we need to examine the structural issues of access, participation, and communication, together with the agency of civic and state actors Gaynor, & O'Brien (2017). Public sphere must never be limited to a clique, and access must be as open as possible (Bolton, 2005). In public sphere theory, individuals aim to establish shared agreement and organize action in society in rational reasoning and consensus-building (Bolton 2005).

According to Dryzek (2000) in Graham's (2009), "deliberation as a social process is distinguished from other kinds of communication in that deliberators are amenable to changing their judgments, preferences, and views during their interactions, which involve persuasion rather than coercion, manipulation, or deception". "It is through deliberation that preference transformation is feasible through discussion because participants are exposed to

fresh information, viewpoints, and arguments that they would not have considered before deliberation under a voting-only account" (Graham, 2009, p. 19).

Similarly, Elster (1998, p. 61) claims that "negotiating and voting alone tend to highlight individual choices and reasons, but open debate among free and equal citizens aims to turn individual preferences into a common will based on the common good.

Graham goes on to say that participation focuses on the instrumental function of deliberation, emphasizing procedures and institutional arrangements as a means of fostering public deliberation aimed at the common good, which should ideally result in legitimate outcomes in the form of rationally motivated consensus. Cohen (1997) portends that, "When properly conducted, public deliberation focused on the common good, requires some form of manifest equality among citizens, and shapes the identity and interests of citizens in ways that contribute to the formation of a public conception of common good". In order to participate in public discourse, participants must put aside their personal interests in the sake of the public good. As a result, only arguments based on impartiality will be allowed in the discussion process, leaving minimal place for private interests in public thinking (Graham, 2009).

Habermas's conventional concept of the public sphere – based primarily on face-to-face encounters between actors – has been questioned by contemporary scholars. Thomson (1995) suggests that contemporary society is marked by a new form of contact that he terms "publicity" mediated, the main features of which are de-spatialized (not confined by time and space). As a result, actors/people can see a wider variety of items since they do not need to occupy the same physical location.

1.7.2   Public Sphere Theory and Bunge la Mwananchi

As already established, public sphere in this context referred to a space where people gather to freely identify and discuss problems affecting the society, and based on that dialogue influence socio-economic and political change. It's a civil arena where public opinions take shape and strong circulation of public opinions can pressure authority groups and limit their actions. In verification of the above, the study used the public sphere theory. Public sphere theory as argued by Overland *(*2018) is an area in social life where individuals can come together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action. The theory was developed by German philosopher Jurgen Habermas in 1962.

Proponents of deliberative democratic public sphere have argued that the BLM as a social movement and alternative medium of information is an ideal deliberative space for increased political participation (see Gacheke, 2014). From Habermas' public sphere perspective, BLM can be regarded as enablers of a deliberative political space in which individuals can openly express ideas and views. (Gacheke, 2014). Bunge la Mwananchi, for example, depicts the surrounding culture and repressive processes based on gender, age, or sexuality (Gacheke, 2014). According to Habermas (1989), the media connects governance, citizenry, intelligence, and the public sphere.

According to Castells (2007) in Loader and Mercea, what does not appear in the media does not exist in the public perception (2011). This indicates the media's influence in the evolution of public debate. They believe that through *Bunge la Mwananchi* (Hagensen, 2014 in Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1985), the marginalized or oppressed congregate for public discourse; this may be viewed as a type of popular education and a social movement

Okoth (2012) goes on to say that *Bunge La Mwananchi's* goal is to generate stronger relationships from current ones, as well as to construct a stronger and sustained movement, culminating in "networks of networks." "To establish regular open forums in all villages throughout the nation and in all urban neighborhoods, with the participating fully of all adults, where members meet daily in level footing to perform great discussions in impassionate but yet directed by courteous and logic dialogues on crucial issues concerning Kenya's existing political and social matters, for introspection, preparation of proposals, and free flow of information of experiences and ideas" (Pambazuka, 2014, p. 6)

This study included the theory because of its tenets which include: Every contributor should have an equal chance to start the conversation, ask questions, discuss, examine and propose; Everyone should have the right to question the determined discussion topics; everyone should have an equal chance to declare their wants, desires, and emotions; speakers should have the right to declare their statements on the procedures of discourse and the practice of these procedures, and if they are excluded through the discussions they should have the freedom to express their position and the relations of hegemony which limited their expression (Livingstone & Lunt,1994).

In other words, the theory disregards class: while this argument does not presuppose or support equality, it still totally excludes class. Even if this has not necessarily been realized, it is known as an empirical concept in the Public Sphere Philosophy (Habermas, 1989). Popular concern: the principle of "common concern" is idealized as a gateway to the public domain – it is what informs discussions and gets people together in the first place. Habermas states that "by" the public domain "we mean, first and foremost, the domain of our social life in which something resembling public opinion can be created. Entry shall be assured to all residents." (P. 223).Inclusiveness: According to Habermas, "everyone must be able to participate" (p. 30). Whenever the public is institutionally identified as an enduring social community, the

"community" becomes the mouthpiece of the "individuals" (Habermas, 1989). According to Keller (2000), Haberm as associates' democratization with political involvement, which he characterizes as the heart of a democratic society and an essential component of personal growth.

For this study to meet its overall objective which is to examine the public sphere theory in the context of Bunge la Mwananchi in Kisumu Central Constituency; the study has developed three specific objects which are to establish the nature of *Bunge la Mwananchi* participants in Kisumu Central Constituency; to establish the speaking criteria for members during *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates in Kisumu Central Constituency; and to determine the messages/content shared during the *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates in Kisumu Central Constituency.

By looking at objective one which is to establish the nature of Bunge la Mwananchi participants in Kisumu Central Constituency will help determine if the BLM participants share common traits as argued by Habermas in public sphere theory. In the theory, there must be of classless audience.

While looking at objective two which is to establish the speaking criteria for BLM participants *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates in Kisumu Central Constituency, Habermas (1997) in Bolton (2005), argue that the public sphere must follow such structural requirements to operate efficiently.

Does BLM leadership structure share the same goal? Livingstone and Lunt, (1994), argues that in the Public Sphere theory (i) every contributor should have an equal chance to start the conversation, ask questions, discuss, examine and propose. By looking at the speaking criteria at BLM this study will determine if BLM speaking criteria is as similar as the one described by Habermas in the public sphere theory as being ''inclusive''.

Lastly, by looking at objective three which is to determine the messages/content shared during the Bunge la Mwananchi debates in Kisumu Central Constituency, the study intended

to investigate if the messages shared in the forum are similar to those that are shared in the public sphere theory. According to Bolton (2005), the level of engagement must represent a mutual devotion to reason and logic. Livingstone and Lunt, (1994) posit that everyone should have the right to question the determined discussion topics.

In objective three, the study intended to find the relation between the messages shared in the BLM with that shared in public sphere theory. Are the content or messages shared in BLM of public concern as demanded by the public sphere theory?

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions and research objectives, significance of the study, scope of the study and theoretical framework. This study purposed to examine the Public Sphere Theory in the context of *Bunge la Mwananchi* (BLM) in Kisumu Central Constituency. It purposed to investigate if public sphere theory succeeds in offering useful insights into the operations of *Bunge la Mwananchi* and if that offer provides an adequate theoretical framework to establish the nature of *Bunge la Mwananchi* participants; establish the speaking criteria for members during *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates, and to determine the messages/content shared during the *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates, so as to find out if they are in tandem with the workings of public sphere theory. The theoretical framework used was Public Sphere Theory.

This study included this theory because of its tenets which include: public concern, inclusivity and disregard of class. These tenets were sufficient for this study, to that extent it was the only theory that was used.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews theoretical literature from across the world and describes the local situation in terms of the aims. It also provides a review of critical literature by highlighting gaps in relation to the variables employed in this study. The literature review is broken down into three major sections: establishing the type of participants in public debates; establishing the participation parameters in public debates; and determining the messages/content presented during public debates, which are the primary issues in this study.

2.2 Nature of participants in public forums

Communication is a process of sending and/or receiving information. However, for communication to take place, there has to be a sender, a recipient, and a medium/channel upon which the exchange of information occurs. Harold Laswell, in his communication model of 1948, defined communication by looking at who said what, what was said, in what channel, to whom, and with what effect (Laswell, 1948). Laswell's theory underscores the critical role of the composition of any medium of communication. To that extent, this study is looking at the nature of participants of *Bunge la Mwananchi* because they represent the senders and recipients of messages shared during the debates.

The need to investigate the nature of BLM participants is to know who constitutes these forums. Every medium of information has set of participants. For example, newspapers have its writers, reporters and editors and readers. In BLM, there is need to know who its membership in terms of age is, race, gender, education among others. The importance of looking at the nature of participants allows the researcher to know if BLM meets the essential tenet of public sphere of disregarding of class as argued by Habermas. The nature of

participants plays a huge role in all mediums of information such as determination of quality of debates as well as the messages discussed.

Theory of the public sphere in Bello and Wilkinson (2016), Habermas (2006) claims that it was created as a public space between state and people, an unbiased platform where citizens may participate in the formation, exchange, and mobilization of political beliefs... It exists independently of the state and the official economy, and its members meet to debate topics of common interest, criticize the government, and hold the government accountable to the people. According to Habermas, the development of the public sphere enabled public opinion to operate as a check on governmental authority and strong interests that constituted bourgeois society.

He went on to say that the traditional bourgeois public sphere was built around rational critical debates in which the worth of ideas were more important than the identities of participants. To summarize, the public sphere was conceived as a forum where people meet as co-equals and engage in public issue debates in a rational-critical fashion, then guide state actions. Thus, the public sphere was a communicative fulcrum within which the bourgeois learned to constitute themselves into a counter-hegemonic force and generate collective (public) power. In other words, the public sphere is the arena for diverse opinions (Bello & Wilkinson, 2016).

Bunge la Mwananchi has grown in popularity among liberal students, university academics, lawmakers, laborers, farmers, and the jobless since the beginning of the new century (BLM 2010). *Bunge la Mwananchi's* members were mostly jobless or hawkers looking for a place to express and discuss their opinions on social and political issues with their peers. *Bunge la Mwananchi* rallies were often more active during major political events, such as elections and constitutional amendments (Kimari & Rasmussen, 2010).

Bunge la Mwananchi is considered an open platform and encourages anyone to initiate a platform (BLM, 2010). Gacheke(2014. p 11),opines that ''there is nothing more uniquely human than a gathering of ordinary minds, whose membership is diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, cultures, generations, and physical abilities, and cuts across different social groupings and classes where people gather in an open location on a regular basis for amicable dialogues to critically evaluate political and socio-economic developments''.

Activists, philosophers, and ordinary Kenyans have used BLM as a forum to share their thoughts, discuss topics, and fight for social change (McNair, 2015). Sishak (2016) agrees with him, claiming that the people's parliament is an encouraging example of how people may develop commitment to a different approach that attempts to alter the rules of the game rather than remaining caught in pre-structured frameworks and playgrounds of exclusions.

Okoth (2012), argues that the members of the BLM advocate for good governance propelled by a desire for citizens to enjoy their rights and freedoms. They offer mass education to the residents of Kisumu concerning current political affairs, for instance, on the importance of voter registration. They act as watchdogs for the government since they criticize the government and advocate for change, thus preventing politicians from getting too comfortable (Okoth, 2012).

This study argues that participants of BLM are comprised of hawkers, students, scholars etc. The group transcends beyond class in that it disregards one's educational background or economic status or gender of the participants. The form allows anyone to start a conversation, ask questions, make a contribution without the fear of sense feeling out of place.

This is reinforced by Okoth (2012), who claims that BLM is a community volunteering movement headed by the underprivileged, disenfranchised, and disadvantaged parts of Kenya who are unable to satisfy their basic needs and is driven by selflessness and civic spirit. "Bunge la Mwananchi is the idea of organizing grassroots people around their self-

identified development challenges to push for a people-led development agenda is to dialogue on pertinent community issues, formally or informally, in neighborhoods and markets, on the roadside, and under a tree". (Nyongesa, 2011, p. 20).

Bunge la Mwananchi's practice is based on a continuous discourse that frequently results in an open-ended "negotiation of meaning," in which issues are collectively handled via a continuous cycle of socialization and the production of knowledge, norms, and values (Bunge la Mwananchi, 2019). Bunge la Mwananchi reflects the surrounding society and repressive processes based on gender, age, or sexuality through its active members, not least the continual influx of newcomers owing to the open membership structure (Gacheke, 2014). Such processes, on the other hand, are publicly addressed and contested via meditation practice in a "war of ideas," which is nonetheless defined by core ideals of inclusion and equality, contributing to the emergence of revolutionary democracy. As a result, one may say that the BLM reflects the non-normative nature of participating organizations or societies.

As a result, the Bunge la Mwananchi's core principles are more process-oriented, and because they are always mediated, there's also a well-established standard of equal inclusion and equity (Hagensen, 2014). Citizens can participate in decision-making and other community activities through democratic meetings, (Anita, 2016). Conventional communication networks can be viewed as important "mediated spaces" for the administration and preservation of local political power in this regard.

Political parties, special-interest groups, pressure groups, charities, and so forth, which operate according to their internal public spheres, may generate a kind of quasi-public opinion. Their representatives then enter the general public sphere to express opinions which, insofar as they also represent broader public opinion, may contribute to a rational–critical public debate, influence political processes and hold the system accountable. How 'public'

the opinion is expressed depends on how the organization's membership is constituted and how it relates to the state, to other social organizations, and the mass media (Keane, 2000). Keane (2000) goes on to argue that the public domain requires individuals to be active participants in the democratic process. This includes not just formal civic involvement, such as voting, but also bringing people together to debate current political and social concerns in their daily lives (a precondition to voting). Furthermore, it is this informal political discussion amongst people on a daily basis that is a necessary component of the public sphere. Second, the public domain contains decentralized communication venues (free of state and economic control) where individuals can freely and publicly engage in debate and political conversation (Keane, 2000).

It's vital to realize that these places might be built from two different perspectives. They may be seen at both the micro and macro levels (Keane, 2000). At the microeconomic scale, communication spaces may be a local bar, a hairstylist, or a town hall meeting, while at the macroeconomic scale, they could be global media. Second, a distinction between formal and informal may be drawn here. Parliaments, legislatures, and even e-juries are examples of formal communication places, whereas workshop cafeterias and retail malls are examples of informal communicative spaces.

While looking at the literature, it becomes evident that in BLM forums there is no special requirement to participate. The forums are open to all. Additionally, literature also points out to the fact that membership transcends age, gender, employment or education background. The literature demonstrates that members of BLM are not defined by education or any other societal expectations but points out to a case where one only need to be present at the venue to participate to be a considered a member.

Bunge la Mwananchi, as an alternative media, was formed by people who were deprived human rights and acceptable living arrangements, (Gacheke, 2014). According to Diepeveen

(2016), scholars used popular music, literature, art forms, and theatre as a common mode of expression. Popular arts were potential platforms through which people could contest the dominant political order by circulating alternative ideas of authority, difference, and inequality. An example of circulating alternative ideas, as argued by Diepeveen, was in Ellis' work on pavement radio in West Africa that located the contestation of authority in informal discussion in the streets. More recent studies identify similar possibilities across different media, from interactive radio broadcasts to rumors circulating through mobile phones (Diepeveen, 2016).

While Bunge la Mwananchi's public profile has grown, the group's activities remain largely spontaneous and unstructured. "The movement has been chastised for its inability to formulate meaningful proposals. The movement has failed to move forward and implement numerous specific proposals, or to attain a certain level of professionalism in the use of media and the Internet, or self-confidence in dealing with Kenya's political forces, political parties, and institutions in the end". (Muyuka, 2019, p. 10).

Whereas many scholars and researcher have conducted studies on the nature of participants in public debates, the studies have been mostly limited their investigations to formal institutions such as National Assembly, The Senate or mainstream media such as radio or television. Few or no scholar has attempted to study nature of participants in informal institutions such as Bunge la Mwananchi as an alternative media especially in Kisumu Central Constituency. It's this gap that this study intends to fill by exploring this objective.

2.3 Speaking criteria in public forums

All forms of information mediums and public spheres have laws that govern their activities including the participation of members in the said forums. For instance, National Assembly, the Senate, local Barazas, even the social media group have specific guides and standing orders on how members contribute to the conversation. Many of these forums only permits

members to participate if they abide by the governing rules. It is for this reason that this study intends to look at the speaking criteria of BLM. The study intends to find out if this applies to BLM during the debates.

By looking at speaking criteria the study intends to ascertain the way of contribution or participation of the membership. Additionally, all forms of media have guides when it comes to participation for instance the national assembly or barazas or social media and all forms of public spere have specific guides or standing orders. One must raise their hand, present an agenda or present a bill or petition among others. The study intends to find out if this applies to it.

According to Habermas, (1989), "everyone must be able to participate" (p. 30) during the public sphere meetings. To ensure that this need is met, the study intends to look at the speaking criteria of BLM members during the BLM debates. The need to look at the speaking criteria is hinged on the fact that inclusivity of members is a key tenet in the public sphere theory. For there to be inclusivity, there must be equal chance for every member to participate in the conversation. It's only by knowing the speaking criteria of the BLM that the study can ascertain or not if there is inclusivity in BLM forums as is envisaged in the public sphere theory.

As argued by Okoth, (2012),*Bunge la Mwananchi* is dynamic and heterogeneous, unlike other organized movements with traditions, standards, and ideologies, there are no traditions, conventions, or doctrines in this movement. This is illustrated by what the importance of the campaign supporters, their goals and demands are. Some condemn the causes of their problems as capitalist globalization, free markets, outsourcing and the accentuation of injustice and socioeconomic inequality; others, on the other hand, focus on ecological and moral issues while ignoring social and political issues. Many people perceive the campaign as

the starting point for interaction with the government and worldwide multilateral organizations, as well as a place to discuss their issues (Okoth, 2012).

Bunge la Mwananchi is now well-known throughout the country and has remained a prominent role in popular elections around the country because of its effect on vital topics such as social justice, equality, poverty eradication, and increased participatory democracy, as well as other civil rights. The movement is today filled with a wide range of social forces, players, and agencies, each with its own goals, which can be conflicting at times but are unified in their operational techniques. "Members of the non-confessional, non-governmental, and non-partisan movement include non-governmental organizations, community-based groups, faith-based organizations, trade unions, sports clubs, and non-governmental people who participate in specific actions" (Ogutu, 2015. p 14).

"The movement has persisted because it is grassroots and led by ordinary people whose concerns are more focused on the local and national levels than on global issues. Nonetheless, the movement acts on a global scale through official and informal networks that organize at the national and international levels"(Okoth, 2012, p. 11). In the public sphere theory, Habermas sees the public sphere "as the domain of social life, where the sharing of ideas, viewpoints and views on exploration and issues of popular concern/goodness takes place, eventually shaping public opinion, which, in turn, directs the political system" (Habermas, 2006. p, 50). "The public domain springs into being as private people openly come together and discuss the political and social problems of the day" (Terje, 2015, p. 9).

Habermas asserts that the mainstream press, in particular, has started to shift from being keepers of the public sphere with a discerning lens on the state to being an income, commercially large corporation, whose main concern has been to build utilization, and whose role as a critical eye has shifted to that of "opinion manager." "Habermas himself follows the concept of Bernhard Peters that communication and decision-making processes lie along a

center-periphery axis as a system of 'sluices' in public debate and usually include two ways of problem-solving: the periphery of several kinds of groups and organizations that provide and receive political decision-making ideas and opinions, and structured political procedures in the co-operative processes" (Terje, 2015, p. 43).

According to Habermas in McQuail (2005) that "access to the space is free, and expression is guaranteed. The space lies between the base and the top of society and mediation takes place between the two". The base, he adds, "can be considered to be the private sphere of the life of individual citizens, while the political institutions at the center or top are part of the public life". The same argument is shared by Nyambuga (2011), who avers that the freedoms of expression, assembly, and the press are the cornerstones of the public sphere ideology. These liberties are the foundations of a liberal democracy, (Nyambuga, 2011).

Graham (2009) contends that the public sphere and the network of ordinary political discourses that comprise it become crucial spaces for discussion and democracy under this logic. People become more aware and informed, attempt to understand others, put new and old ideas to the test, and express, evolve, and adjust their preferences through regular involvement in everyday discussion. According to Graham (2009), all of this is required for robust, efficient, and proactive public opinion, as well as the public sphere in general.

Despite the fact that it is not recognized as a political group in Kenya, the informal structure has formed rules and processes, held elections for its leaders, and has grown in importance. Along with advocating for constitutional and political changes, the group organizes rallies and demonstrations against topics such as excessive use of force, violence towards women, and predatory pricing (McNair, 2015).Although there is abundant literature and several scholarly studies on speaking criteria or on participation criterions in public debates such as Parliament, there is no attempt by scholars to examine the speaking criteria in Bunge la

Mwananchi in Kisumu Central Constituency. It's this gap that this study intends to fill by exploring this objective.

2.4 The messages discussed during public forums

It is not possible to talk about the nature of participants in any medium without looking at the messages shared and the effects of the said messages and as argued by Jacobson (2000), public sphere debates, especially in low-income countries, must include engagement between all people in society, including those with less influence, when examining Habermas' work. This debate is critically further established by Askanius and Østergaard (2014). It provides both conceptual constructs and theoretical perspectives into the transition from conventional Habermasian understanding to more flexible and inclusive media-technology-mediated arenas of public sphere theory.

The media industry has certain opportunities as a forum for the public sphere. To be taken seriously and to be competitive, the rules that players must play according to. The public sphere can raise problems through deliberation, provide arguments, define interpretations and suggest solutions. Demands from social movements and interest groups in civil society are transformed into political concerns and claims in the public domain, and manifest, reflexive public views are expressed.

Habermas claims that the model of deliberative communication offers a critical norm that can be blamed for disruptions and shortcomings in the public domain on the other hand, BLM acts as a forum for ordinary people to debate socio-economic and political problems impacting their lives and the general public. It envisions a Kenya where people possess unfettered freedom to mobilize to free themselves from all kinds of repression and exploitation (Gacheke, 2014).

"Bunge la Mwananchi is presently known nationally and has remained a key player in popular contestation countrywide due to its effect on critical issues such as social justice,

equality, poverty eradication, greater participatory democracy, among other civil liberties. The movement has worked to forward a variety of proposals and assert itself as 'alternative' rather than 'against' everything, allowing it to gain clout among political leaders, political parties, and the government" (Okoth, 2012 p. 29).

Okoth (2012), argues that the members of the BLM advocate for good governance propelled by a desire for citizens to enjoy their rights and freedoms. They offer mass education to the residents of Kisumu concerning current political affairs, for instance, on the importance of voter registration. They act as watchdogs for the government since they criticize the government and advocate for change, thus preventing politicians from getting too comfortable (Okoth, 2012)."Civil society's communication component can be viewed as a public domain dimension. Civil society is a collection of self-organized and choreographed acts within unions, coalitions, social movements, and interest groups in which individuals participate freely and on equal terms in order to attain public goals of shared or universal interest" (Boeder, 2000, p. 37).

Bunge la Mwananchi is now influential nationally, and because it has an impact on related issues, it has continued to be a key player in national challenges such as social justice, equity, poverty reduction, greater participatory democracy, among other civil liberties, (Okoth,2012).The Bunge la Mwananchi members promote good governance, motivated by a wish for residents to enjoy their rights and liberty. They give mass education to Kisumu citizens on current political affairs, such as the value of registration of voters. When they condemn the government and campaign for reform, they serve as watchdogs for the government, thereby stopping lawmakers from being too relaxed and being able to disregard the voices of voters without government or personal power worries. Finally, they also fight against land grabbing by numerous well-connected individuals and groups in Kenya (Bokros et, al 2017).

This is reflected by what movement member's value: their expectations and demands. Some attribute their problems to economic globalization, free trade, privatization, and the worsening of poverty and social inequality, while others emphasize ecological and spiritual issues while neglecting socio-political reasons. Others oppose it on the basis of a fundamental critique of not just the dominant economic model but also of the civilization mode, and suggest an alternative. Some welcome the movement as a forum for interaction with the government and the international multilateral organizations, while others reject it on the basis of a fundamental critique not just of the current economic model but also of the civilization paradigm. Bunge La Mwananchi has survived because to the variety of ideas and the difficulties of reaching a consensus agenda (Okoth, 2012).

Bunge la Mwananchi's method is a perpetual conversation that consists of an often expansive 'communication process,' in which issues are collectively handled in a continuous cycle of socialization and the formation of knowledge, norms, and values (Bunge la Mwananchi, 2019). *Bunge la Mwananchi* reflects the surrounding society and repressive systems based, for example, on gender, age, or sexuality, through participating members and, not least, the continual influx of newcomers owing to the open membership structure (Gacheke, 2014).

Such processes, however, are addressed and contested publicly via contemplative practice in a "war of ideas," while remaining framed by the core ideals of openness and equality, helping to the formation of a radical democratic practice. As a result, the BLM may be said to represent the non-normative nature of participatory institutions or communities. Therefore, the fundamental values of the *Bunge la Mwananchi* are more process-oriented, and as they are always negotiated, there is also a highly institutionalized norm of equal access and inclusiveness (Hagensen, 2014).

Whereas there have been numerous studies on the messages discussed during public forums there is little or evidence to demonstrate that there has been a study to look at the messages

discussed during BLM debates in Kisumu Central constituency. It's this gap that this study intended to fill by exploring this objective.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed theoretical literature from across the world and described the local situation in terms of the study objects. It also provided a review of critical literature by highlighting gaps in relation to the variables employed in this study. The literature review was broken down into three major sections: establishing the type of participants in public debates; establishing the participation parameters in public debates; and determining the messages/content presented during public debates.

From the reviewed literature, it is evident that even though the four elements of the public sphere as envisaged by Habermas have been presented in different words, the objects have largely remained the same. Literature points to a close similarity of the workings of the public sphere and the objects of the *Bunge la Mwananchi*. Literature demonstrated that public sphere is a space where regardless of class, race, ethnicity, status, and social standing, one has the right to an opinion and the right to share that opinion without judgment or discrimination - a space where like-minded persons, not just professionals or politicians gather for pertinent public dialogue - the same ideals propagated by *Bunge la Mwananchi*.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

A research methodology is described by Ogolo (1966) as a procedure followed in realizing the goals and objectives of the research. This chapter explains how the necessary data will be collected, processed, and analyzed in order to meet the research goals. It covers the areas of research design that will be used, as well as the study research site, the study population, sampling procedures (sampling technique and sample size), data collecting, data analysis and presentation, and ethical considerations. The next sections go through these terms in further depth.

3.2 Research Design

A research design is the structuring of settings for data collection and analysis in such a way that it tries to combine relevance to the study objective with efficiency in the operation (Kothari, 2004). A descriptive research design was adopted in this investigation since it was thought to be appropriate for examining a specific occurrence. As Kothari (2004) further observes, the goal of descriptive research is to correctly and thoroughly characterize a population, circumstance, or phenomena. This can address the questions on what, where, when, and how, but not why (Kothari, 2004). Additionally, it may explore one or more variables using a wide range of research approaches. It is a good choice when the goal of the research is to identify traits, frequency, trends, and classifications. It is beneficial when little is known about a topic or situation (McCombes, 2020).

3.3 Area of the Study

The study was based on both the geographical and academic thematic areas. The geographical area was the Kisumu Central Constituency and the library. Kisumu Central Constituency was preferred because according to Kisumu County Urban Institutional

Development Strategy (CUIDS) (2018/2019), it hosts most of the socio-economic and political activities in the county; it hosts Kisumu County Headquarters making it the most active part of Kisumu County. Additionally, the population within Kisumu Central Constituency is also largely heterogeneous as compared to other sub-counties, (CUIDS) 2018/2019). Additionally, this study was situated at the Kisumu Central Constituency because according to Ali Simira, BLM Chairman, Central Square, it is where many BLM gatherings are centered having started its activities in 1991. According to Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) Housing and Population census (2019), Kisumu Central Constituency has a population of 170,592.

This is part of 1,155,574 population of the extensive Kisumu County. Kisumu Central Constituency has six wards Milimani, Kondele, Kaloleni-Shauri Moyo, Railways, Migosi, Nyalenda B.

According to Kisumu County Urban Institutional Development Strategy (CUIDS) 2018-2019, the county's urbanization is centered on Kisumu City and the county's satellite high-population centers, which are dispersed throughout the county. Kisumu City is the county's most populous and densely populated urban area. The city covers Kisumu Central, Kisumu East, and parts of Kisumu West constituencies/Sub-Counties. Kisumu City is the county's commercial core and administrative center.

Thematically, this study falls under political communication. Political communications have long been central to the mechanism of political and decision making in society. In Africa for example, political overtones overshadow most occurrences (Owuor, 2012).

3.4 Study Population

"The target population is a complete set of individuals, cases, or objects with some common characteristics to which the researcher wants to generalize the study" (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999. P, 30). This study focused mainly on the *Bunge la Mwananchi* participants at the

Kisumu's Central Constituency in Kisumu County. According to the KNBS Population and Housing Census (2019), Kisumu Central Constituency has 170, 592 people. There are six wards in Kisumu Central constituency including Milimani-Market, Migosi, Railways, Nyalenda B, Kondele, and Kaloleni-Shauri Moyo. The membership of Bunge la Mwananchi in Kisumu Central Constituency is estimated at 1,500*(Bunge la Mwanainchi, 2019)*.

Since there are few BLMs in the Constituency, this study using census as a sampling method sampled all of the BLMs in Milimani-Market, Migosi, Railways, Nyalenda B, Kondele, and Kaloleni BLM, Shauri Moyo. The study participants included 10 BLM chairpersons from each branch and 8 general members of each branch. The chairpersons were selected because they are they are the leaders of their branches and so are better knowledgeable, about respective BLM. They are also better informed and also custodians of the branch instruments. The participants were selected based on how active they are in the branch, attendance, been residence in that ward for more than six months and their availability during the data collection period.

3.5 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Interviews: The researcher adopted a purposive sampling technique based on the homogeneity/similarity of *Bunge la Mwananchi* in Kisumu Central Constituency. The study used the Purposive Sampling Technique for in-depth interviews concerning the selection of the participants. In selection of the chairpersons, a total of 10 BLM leaders in the 10 active BLM branches in the 6 wards were identified. These branches included Central Square BLM, Kondele BLM, Nyalenda BLM, Migosi BLM, Kaloleni BLM, Manyatta BLM, Kaloleni BLM, Shauri Moyo BLM, and Railways BLM. The participants were chosen based on their knowledge as leaders of the respective *Bunge la Mwananchi* forums. Audience choice was informed by leadership positions who are also custodians of vital BLM information; willingness of the participant to participate in the study; availability of a participant during

the day of data collection; an active member of the BLM branch backed by the respective chairman's records or corroboration by another member and, a resident of Kisumu Central Constituency. Purposive sampling technique is a deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. It is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants (Bernard, 2002).

Focus Group Discussions: For Focus Group Discussions, the study used Convenience Sampling Technique. This was premised on the willingness of the participant to participate in the study; availability of a participant during the day of data collection; a resident of Kisumu Central Constituency and the participant being an active member of BLM and having attended BLM sessions for at least six months.

Convenience sampling is a non-random sampling technique in which members of the target population who meet particular practical requirements, such as ease of access, geographic proximity, availability at a specific time, or desire to participate, are included in the study (Dörnyei, 2007). It is affordable, accessible and the subjects are readily available (Ilker, et al. 2016)

Through sampling, some population elements are chosen as representations of the overall population using probability to achieve a representational level of dependability inside the chosen region (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). The study used 15 Focus Group discussions of 8 participants drawn from 10 *Bunge La Mwananchi* forums in the 6 wards in Kisumu Central Constituency.

Whereas the studied had identified 10BLMsas study sample, some branches had very many members to be included in one FGD as such, the researcher opted to have two or three FGDs from a single BLM branch. One such case was at the Central Square BLM which had so many members all who wanted to participate in the FGD. It's these additional FGDs from other branches that increased the number to 15 even though the BLMS were 10. The other

BLM branches that were part of the study included Kondele BLM, Nyalenda 'B' BLM, Migosi BLM, Kaloleni BLM, Manyatta 'A' BLM, Shauri Moyo BLM, and Railways BLM. For the in-depth interviews, the study selected one leader from each of the 10*Bunge La Mwananchi* forums in the 6 wards within the Kisumu Central Constituency. It is important to note that each ward had at least one active BLM branch.

3.6 Data Collection Techniques

This is an exploratory qualitative study that used in-depth interview, and focused group discussion only as its data collection methods. Secondary data was also used. Secondary data is information gathered by someone other than the original user. It signifies that the data is already accessible and has been analyzed. Secondary data includes publications such as magazines, newspapers, books, and journals. It could be data that has already been published or data that has yet to be published (Creswell, 2014). The author used government journals, public documents, historical and statistical materials, and technical and trade publications as secondary data in this study.

3.6.1 Data Collection Instruments

To obtain data, the study used interview schedules, note-taking and voice recorders during interview sessions.

For Focus Group Discussions, the study used FGD guide, note-taking and voice recorder as data collection tools.

3.6.2 Interview

According to Easwaramoorthy & Fataneh (2006), an interview is a dialogue to collect knowledge. Millar et al., (2002: 3) define interview as a dyadic interaction in which one individual plays the role of interviewer and the other takes on the role of interviewee and both of these roles carry clear expectations concerning behavioral and attitudinal approach.

For this study, the researcher opted to carry out individual in-depth interviews. An in-depth interview according to Mugenda & Mugenda (2019) is a qualitative technique of collecting data from a single respondent. Typically, a sample of single respondent say 5 people would be selected and each person interviewed on the same topic for about two or three hours.

The technique involves directly questioning, open-ended discussions and nonverbal communication to obtain detailed information on the topic under investigation (Mugenda & Mugenda 2019).

This study used in-depth interviews where the researcher interviewed the chairperson of BLM as they are the custodians of BLM operations. Interviews are a practical approach because there is a need to obtain in-depth knowledge about people's beliefs, emotions, perceptions, and feelings. Interviews are helpful as the purpose of the interview refers to topics involving detailed interrogation and significant analysis. Face-to-face interviews are necessary because the target audience can connect easier through face-to-face conversations than via writing or phone interactions (e.g., children, elderly or disabled people (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

In-depth Interviews were done to the selected BLM leaders' leaders and the selected BLM attendees. The interviews' objective was to provide more details on the nature of BLM and help meet the aims and objectives of the study, as stated in Chapter Two. It was also to help the researcher get in-depth information, which might not be possible to get during a focus group discussion. During these in-depth interviews, a total of 10 selected BLM leaders in the twelve active BLM branches in the 6 wards were interviewed. These branches included Central Square BLM, Kondele BLM, Nyalenda BLM, Migosi BLM, Kaloleni BLM, Manyatta BLM, Shauri Moyo BLM, and Railways BLM. Audience choice was informed by leadership position; custodians of vital BLM information, willingness of the participant to participate in the study; availability of a participant during the day of data collection; an

active member of the BLM branch backed by the respective chairman's records or corroboration by another member and, a resident of Kisumu Central Constituency. The respondents comprised of different groups. All participants were male. This was because BLM is primarily dominated by males in the area of study. There were no female participants in all the sampled BLM debates in Kisumu Central Constituency. The study used interview schedule, note taking and voice recorders to conduct the interviews.

3.6.3Focus Group Discussion

The focus groups were centered on group interaction around subjects that the researcher provided. (Morgan, 1997). The goal was to gather information and statistics from the interactions among members during these focus group conversations. The purpose of the focus group discussion was to have a better understanding of the participants so that the researcher could learn about personal experiences and beliefs of members as well as identifying concerns such as participants' behavior and perceptions, group dynamics, organizational structures, and cultural norms.

Additionally, the FGD would aid in the generation of information that otherwise would not have emerged if the participants had not interacted. During these FGDs, the study used 15 Focus Group discussions of 8 participants drawn from 10 BLM forums in the 6 wards in Kisumu Central Constituency.

The justification for using 8participants was because and as argued by Dawson et al (1993), focus groups work well with around four to twelve people. Groups with more than eight [participants] can be difficult to control. The discussants were 8 in the focus groups drawn from the 10 BLM branches in the 6 wards in the Constituency who were directly linked to these branches and also active members. The researcher selected the participants with the guidance of the BLM Chairpersons of the respective BLM branches. The discussions were

conducted at the same wards the BLM holds its deliberations and the researcher recorded the discussions by taking notes, FGD guide, and voice recorders as data collection tools.

Audience choice was informed by willingness of the participant to participate in the study; availability of a participant during the day of data collection; an active member of the BLM branch, a resident of Kisumu Central Constituency and the participant having been an active member of BLM and had attended BLM sessions for at least six months. The respondents comprised of different groups. All participants were male. This was because BLM is primarily dominated by males in the area of study. There were no female participants in all the sample BLM debates in Kisumu Central Constituency.

In the study proposal, even though the researcher had anticipated to conduct interviews and FGDs in all the active branches in the area of study; however, based on the concept of data saturation or saturation concept, the study limited the sample to 10 BLM forums in the 6 wards only. While conducting interviews, the researcher noted that there were a lot of similarities in the responses from the participants. That, over and over again, there were similar responses. This indicated that there was no fresh information that was expected to be contributed, which would either improve or change the study's findings. It's this saturation of responses that prompted the researcher to reduce the sample size. As argued by Saunders et al (2017), saturation concept can be employed in qualitative research as a principle for terminating data collection and/or analysis, Saunders et al (2017).

3.7 Reliability and Validity

Various variables can affect the quality and reliability of the findings of qualitative studies in the field. In the following section, specific considerations that may influence the authenticity of data obtained from interviews are discussed in the sense of the social constructivist approach; the positivist criteria of strict objectivity are dismissed because of the desire to minimize researcher bias (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2010: 41).

It is dismissed since the topic of the research itself; in this case, *Bunge la Mwananchi* is perceived to be complicated, mistaken, and difficult to differentiate from its meaning. As such, absolute objectivity is therefore not feasible, the researcher is included in this sense. The study for this analysis is informed by subjectivity, where the researcher's own opinions are of some importance.

The reliability of a research instrument enhances its ability to measure what is intended. This view is also shared by Cohen and Morrison (2007), who stated that "reliability can be regarded as a fit between what researcher records as data and what occurs in the natural setting trial being researched." According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), reliability concerns how empirical indicators are consistent across two or more attempts to measure the theoretical concept. Wiersman (1985) stressed that "the research instruments must be piloted as a way of finalizing them." This is critical because it allows the instruments' reliability to be determined. Reliability is synonymous with repeatability or stability (Kothari, 2004). "A measurement that yields consistent results over time is said to be reliable" (Wiersman, 1985). When the measurement is prone to random error, it may lack reliability. The pretest was done in Nyalenda 'A' ward in Kisumu East Constituency before rolling the main study in Kisumu Central Constituency. The choice of Kisumu East Constituency was because it shares similar factors such as heterogeneous population, commercial activities, BLM activities and membership among others.

A pilot study was conducted in one of the *Bunge la Mwananchi* branches based at the Nyalenda 'A' ward in Kisumu East Constituency before rolling the main study in Kisumu Central Constituency. This was to determine if the issues that the actual study intended to pursue would be raised during this pilot study. During the pilot study, inadequate items were modified, and others discarded to improve the instruments' quality. Twenty participants (20 males) were drawn from the Kisumu East Constituency. There was the use of in-depth

interviews with leaders and attendees of the selected BLM and focus group discussions. These respondents, however, were not included in the actual study.

The choice for Kisumu East, constituencies as a site for a pilot study was driven by what similarities of several factors in Kisumu Central Constituency. And as noted in Kisumu County Urban Institutional Development Strategy (CUIDS) (2018-2019), Kisumu Central, shares some similarities as Kisumu East, constituencies/Sub-Counties in that they are inhabited by heterogeneous population, commercial activities.

"Validity indicates the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure" (Kothari, 2004). According to Cohen and Morrison (2007), validity might be addressed to the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved in qualitative data. Paton (2002) stressed that validity is the extent to which a research tool measures what it ought to measure by asking the right questions and how accurate and meaningful the inferences made from the findings are. Orodho and Kombo (2002) further explained that validity might be improved through careful sampling and appropriate instrumentation of the data. Therefore, in this study, validity was established by pre-testing the instruments on a population with the same characteristics as that under investigation. In this case, it was conducted in one of the *Bunge la Mwananchi* branches based at the Nyalenda 'A' ward in Kisumu East Constituency.

3.8.Data Analysis and Presentation

Data analysis is the process of obtaining, modeling, and translating raw data into interpretable designs in order to emphasize relevant information, generate conclusions, and help decision-making. (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Data analysis was essential for this study because the process helped describe facts, detection of patterns, and development of proper explanations. The data collected by the use of various instruments were first edited to get the relevant data for the study.

Even though there are several different types of qualitative data analysis this study used narrative analysis in analyzing data. This involved identifying common patterns within the responses during recorded interviews and focus groups discussion and critically analyzing them to achieve research aims and objectives. On data presentation, the study used verbatim, text, and narration.

The study also relied on content analysis. Content analysis is a specialized form of thematic analysis that includes measuring instances of specific events that may be of some interest; codes may then be used as the basis for qualitative analysis. In this study, content analysis included the categorization of spoken or behavioral data to classify, and summarize the collected data.

The process started at transcription of the audio recordings of in-depth interviews of BLM chairpersons, and the focus groups discussions of BLM selected attendees into written form for closer scrutiny. The transcription, also involved judging what level of detail is relevant to the study. After transcription, there was the data coding or labelling. Here, codes were used to help lower the volume of raw data and to help assign identified themes from the data collected in the study. Then there was discovery of significant patterns, and deciphering meaning from data. Finally, there was constructing a logical chain of evidence to make sense of data collected. Using this approach, the researcher manually used each transcript to assign codes to particular words within the variables. The analysis looked at occasions where the data indicated parameters -in this case codes - fall within the variables of the report. It also allowed the researcher to measure the responses, as it is possible to determine the frequency of a particular code.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account while conducting this study. The responders' rights and dignity were protected. This included the option to decline to participate in the

interview schedule as a respondent and the ability to express other opinions on related topics without fear of reprisal. To avoid respondent bias or pre-formed ideas, the goal of the study was clearly stated to the participants without necessary disclosing the study's contents.

Before the research activity began, the participants were notified and consent was obtained to avoid respondents declining to participate. Other people's ideas, techniques, and results have been acknowledged, and proper credit has been given. For the sake of confidentiality, the researcher has secured agreement from respondents. To obtain precise and dependable data, the researcher has maintained objectivity throughout the investigation. Electronic equipment was utilized, such as a tape recorder, although authorization was obtained before the session began. Consent was also be sought from the key persons from the relevant national and county government authorities before any research work begun. Finally, a letter of clearance/recommendation from Maseno University Communication and Media Technology Department, and study consent from The National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) from was sought.

4.0 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the research design and provided justification for using the same. In addition, the area of study, study population was described, the approach for selecting the samples and sample sizes were presented and a justification for the sample size provided. Additionally, data collection techniques and instruments, interviews, focus group discussions, reliability and validity, data analysis and presentation processes were comprehensively described. Lastly, the measures to protect participants from pressure to participate, safety, and privacy risks were provided under ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, the findings from the research which focused on the Examination of the Public Sphere Theory in the Context of Bunge la Mwananchi in Kisumu Central Constituency is presented. Critical examination of the findings in view of the guiding research objectives is done to comprehensively answer the research questions.

4.2. Nature of Study Participants

Nature of participants in this context referred to the basic and shared characteristics of the *Bunge la Mwananchi* participants such as attendance of BLM forums, participation of members in the forums, age, gender, social status, race, and sex, employment and education status.

The research aimed at establishing the nature of *Bunge la Mwananchi* participants in Kisumu Central Constituency. In an attempt to do so, 10 interviews of selected chairpersons of *BLM* were conducted. Fifteen focused group discussions with a pool of 8 participants were also held. The 15 Focus Group discussion participants were drawn from 10 BLM forums in the 6 wards in Kisumu Central Constituency. The FGD respondents comprised of BLM selected leaders and BLM selected attendees. To arrive at the small size of 10 BLM forums in the 6 wards, the researcher didn't use any formula rather, the researcher pegged the sample size on: (i) vibrancy of the BLM branches for example on how active the members during the debates such as Central Square, Kondele, Manyatta, and Nyalenda and (ii) regular attendance of the members in the selected BLM branches such as Migosi, Shauri Moyo; (iii) known venue or location of the BLM branches such as Nyalenda , Central Square, Kondele, Manyatta, Railways among others. The researcher noted that some of the branches whereas were

considered BLM branches they only met when there is a political activity in the region as such, they were excluded from the 10 BLMs sampled.

4.2.1 Age of BLM participants

During an interview with one of the BLM chairpersons, data revealed that:

> ''*Bunge la Mwananchi* is somewhere that anyone can come and be part of the discussion without any prohibition. We don't restrict participation. Anyone can walk in during the sessions and contribute to the debate. We have the young, the old, the youth and the elderly as participants''(Central Square BLM Chair,C01, April 11, 2021).

From the data gathered, it was evident that anyone can participate in the BLM sessions regardless of their age. This finding is supported by the assertion of Okoth, (2012) that BLM membership is diverse, spanning many social groups and classes, and is gender, ethnicity, culture, age/generational, and physical diversity. The study demonstrated that the ages of participants is not a key concern to partake in the discussions. The ages varied from the young, middle-aged to the elderly. Even though the chairpersons and participants said that BLM is open and free to all, the study revealed that there were no children or teenagers in any of the forums.

4.2.2 Gender of BLM participants

During an interview with one of the BLM chairpersons, data revealed that women perceive the BLM forums as a ground for idle talk.

> ''Women hardly come for Bunge la Mwanainchi debates. I think many of them think that BLM forums are a place where jobless and idle men gather to waste time. That we gather here [BLM forums] for cheap and for idle talk'' (Migosi BLM Chair,C05, April17, 2021).

Data demonstrated that as much as anyone can participate in the BLM sessions regardless of gender or ethnicity, culture, or physical diversity, there were no women attendees or chairpersons in all the BLM forums. The study discovered that the reason why women don't actively engage in the forums is because they think BLM gatherings is a place where jobless and idle men gather to waste time. This was revealed during an interview with a BLM chairperson who said the following with regard to the women participation:

> ''For the longest time that I have been a member of BLM and later as chairman, I have seen few women come to our forums. Those that do are usually female politicians who come to ask for votes or government employees who come to share information for example on health matters for instance a polio campaign; other than that, I haven't seen any. However, we do have Community Based Organization (CBO) which is part of our activities. These CBOs have many women as members'' (Manyatta BLM Chair C03, May 9, 2021).

According to participants during the FGDs, some women would like to participate but are hesitant because there are no other women present in the forums ,as such, they are afraid of being singled out hence scrutiny or of fear of being judged.

> ''I think that women would like to participate but are afraid that they will be singled out by the society as engaging in male affairs; and since they are few or no other female participants in our midst, those who are interested seem to stay away for being looked at differently'' (BLM participant, male P01, May20, 2021).

Whereas it is true that participation in the BLM forums is free for all regardless of gender or any other demographical classification, the study observed that women didn't make the list of participants. This means that the views expressed during the meetings here may not capture

the interests of all residents of Kisumu central constituency especially of women as there are no contributions from the women. This negates the tenet of public spere theory of inclusivity and disregard of class as espoused by Habermas (2006). Most of the respondents were men. This was because women shunned the debates based on the reason cited above. The finding therefore partially differs with the assertion of Okoth, (2012) that BLM membership is diverse, spanning many social groups and classes, and is gender, ethnicity, culture, generational, and physical diversity.

4.2.3Membership and composition of BLM participants

According to the findings, membership and composition of BLM forums cut across age, gender, educational qualifications, faith, dialect, or culture. Even though participation in the group is open and free for all, the data revealed that for one to enjoy additional benefits of membership, one must register. To register one must have a valid national ID card, provide physical address/residence and contacts and pay a life membership fee of Ksh 100 in some branches such as the Central Square. Attendance of the BLM is daily although voluntary.

> ''We welcome everybody to participate but if one wants to be a member, one must register with us. To register, one must have a national identification card. This national identification card will tell us who you are and where you come from. You must provide telephone number, place of residence and pay 100 shillings as life membership fee. Presently, we know who is amongst us. We know members and we know guests''. (Shauri Moyo BLM Chair C07, June 5, 2021).

In other branches, the study discovered that there are more requirements for membership as indicated by one of the BLM chairpersons.

> ''Apart from proof of national identification card, those who wish to be members are expected to avail passport size picture, pay 200 per person for membership and another 200 shillings as monthly contribution fee. This goes towards savings for

calamities such as deaths of members or printing of banners for activities we have been invited for. Registered members are provided with name tags which they wear whenever attending a special meeting''. (Nyalenda BLM Chair C10, May 25, 2021).

Data showed that the idea that everyone engaging in the BLM discussion on an equal footing is not entirely true. This is because there are some benefits that are only limited to registered members of the group but not any other participant. One BLM chair said:

''Only registered members can participate in branch activities for example invitations by the national government to attend state functions or when meeting county officials on proposed policies'' (Kondele BLM Chair C09, May7, 2021).

These findings partially agreed with the assertions of Gacheke (2014) who argued Bunge la Mwananchi represents the surrounding society and tyrannical systems based on, for instance, gender, age, or sexuality, through participation and the constant influx of newcomers due to the open membership structure. The findings also partially support the arguments of Okoth (2012) that BLM representation is varied, covering numerous social groupings and levels, and encompasses gender, ethnic, cultural, generational, and physical variety.

Additionally, any member of the public from any part of the country can join in the debates for example, someone from Homabay, or Siaya counties can stop briefly at a BLM forum and then listen to the debate sometimes contribute to the agenda before continuing with his journey.

''We have witnessed occasions where someone would be from Homabay and stop briefly at our forum to listen to what the 'ground' is saying, [sometimes they contribute to the agenda while sometimes they just greet the participants and then proceed with their journey]. In other occasions, we have received participants from Siaya or Bondo join the debates; also, there have been instances where a Canadian

came and participated in the discussions and even told us that they too have a similar thing back in Canada'' (Kaloleni BLM Chair C06, May 23, 2021).

The study further noted that membership cuts across the board. This finding is corroborated by Bolton, (2005) who observed that in public sphere, it must never be limited to a clique, and access must be as open as possible. The finding is also supported by Nyongesa (2011. p, 14). who observed that "*Bunge la Mwananchi's* is the idea of organizing grassroots people together around their self-identified development challenges to push for a people-led development agenda - formally or informally, in neighborhoods and markets, on the roadside, and under a tree; so as to dialogue on key community concerns".

On composition of the BLM, the study observed that members are mostly jobless youth, hawkers, bodaboda riders and cyclists, shoe shiners, activist, politicians, students and university lecturers. This finding supports the assertions of BLM (2010) that *Bunge la Mwanainchi* has grown in popularity among liberal students, university academics, lawmakers, laborers, farmers, and the jobless since the beginning of the new century.

4.2.4 Language used by BLM participants

The researcher noted that the languages used in the BLM sessions is Swahili and English and partially Dholuo.

> ''Our membership cuts across the literate and semiliterate. One doesn't need to be learned and well educated to be a member or participant in Bunge la Mwananchi forums. This means that if you have something to say, and doesn't know how to do so in English or Kiswahili, you can do so in Dholuo.''
>
> (BLM participant, male P34, April 18, 2021)

Whereas the debates are conducted in English and Swahili, the study revealed that members who can't address the gathering in either of the languages can speak in Dholuo. One participant indicated as follows during an FGD forum:

''In some instances, members may want to contribute but they can't speak proper or English or Swahili, many times they just do it in Dholuo. Swahili and English are just part of the languages we use but one is allowed to speak in a language they are most comfortable'' (BLM participant, male P11, February 8, 2021)

This discovery is corroborated by Bokros, et al. (2017), who averred that participant are expected to speak fluent English and Swahili. Even though it is true that participants could speak in Swahili or English, others couldn't and only contribute in vernacular language. These hampered debate since the forums attracts every member of the public – some who doesn't understand Dholuo.

4.2.5 Education/Literacy level of BLM participants

The study observed that anyone can participate in the BLM sessions regardless of their literacy or education level.

''You don't need to be educated to participate in BLM debates. That is why we are here, to break the ranks between the educated and the non-educated'' (BLM participant, male P07, April 21, 2021)

The study showed that the debates attract people with different educational background including lawyers, hawkers, students, bodaboda riders and cyclists, teachers, activists and university lecturers. However, since participants hardly introduce themselves and title everyone appears equal before the other. The fact that BLM cuts across different demographics, it had become fertile ground for politicians and government agencies. Because of this, Kisumu County and even the Regional Commissioner had recognized BLM strength in spreading information to their diverse audience. This was revealed by one BLM participant during an FGD forum.

''If for example, you want to do any public participation or civic education, you must come here. [BLM form.]When the current governor [Prof. Anyang Nyon'go] was developing his manifesto, he invited us at Wigot hotel for a deliberation. He recognized that we are stakeholders in the county's political affairs even as much as we all do not good educational background. (BLM participant P13, April 2, 2021).

This finding is supported by the claim of Okoth, (2012) that BLM membership is diverse, spanning many social groups and classes, and is gender, ethnicity, culture, generational, and physical diversity. Additionally, the research observed that some participants attended the debates because they will get the information in languages, they can understand due to their limited education.

''Some people don't understand English or Kiswahili properly but are eager for information. Since have information based on the media broadcasts, and prints, we retell the same information to these group of participants so that whoever doesn't have the know-how or understanding is in a position to do so''. (BLM participant P025, May 10, 2021).

The findings agree with the claims of Okoth (2012), who posited that the members of the BLM advocate for good governance propelled by a desire for citizens to enjoy their rights and freedoms. They offer mass education to the residents of Kisumu concerning current political affairs, for instance, on the importance of voter registration (Okoth, 2012).

4.2.6Ethnicity of BLM participants

''BLM members are from different ethnicities and not necessarily a group of Luo speaking people even as BLM is based in Kisumu. There are Luhyas, Kambas, Nubians, Kikuyus, Kalenjin and sometimes foreigners who stops to contribute to the

debate. Because of this diversity in background, the BLM is a fertile ground for sourcing for news from different regions who also keen on share their views and opinions on national dialogues'' (BLM participant P09, May12, 2021).

According to Okoth (2012), BLM membership is broad, covering societies and sectors and encompassing ethnicity, gender, religion, generational, and physical variety. This assertion was affirmed by the study findings which revealed that BLM members are from diverse ethnicities and not necessarily a group of Luo speaking people.

> ''We are mixture of many tribes who live herein Kisumu. For example, I am Luhya from Kakamega. Am hawker but after I closed work at 6pm, but I come here to listen to politics and also share my views on national issues. I have never felt discriminated against due to my tribe. We even have nicknames between me and Luo speaking members here'' (BLM participant P07, April26, 2021).

4.2.7 Governance of BLM participants

The study revealed that BLM is fully registered as an organization and has an internal organizational structure. This includes the chairman, vice chairman, secretary, vice secretary, treasurer, organizing secretary, vice organizing secretary, speaker and security officials. The elections are conducted after every two years in accordance with the group Constitution. Only registered members are eligible to participate in the elections.

According to one BLM chairperson, every branch has its officials who elected by eligible members.

> ''The chairman leads the deliberations. Members or participants raises their hands to contribute -it is only the chair that permits one to speak. Anyone can initiate a conversation with the permission of the chair''(BLM participant, male P18, March 15, 2021).

Another BLM chairperson revealed during an interview that:

'' We have our own leadership structure. We have a chairman, vice chairman, secretary, vice secretary, treasurer, organizing secretary, vice organizing secretary, and even security each with a specific role. We conduct our elections after every two years in accordance with the group Constitution but only registered members are eligible to participate in the elections''. (Central Square BLM Chair,C01, April 14, 2021).

This revelation is partially corroborated by Bokros, et al. (2017), who contended that the leadership of the People's Parliament comprised the chairman, the secretary, and the treasurer, who are elected on an open forum after every three years.

4.3 Speaking criteria for members during *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates in Kisumu Central Constituency.

The study sought to establish the speaking criteria for members during *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates. In this study speaking criteria referred to the rules governing the eligibility of BLM members; procedures and qualifications with which BLM members must comply with to begin and continue participating in the BLM debates for example, when to speak and when not to; when to ask questions and when not to when to interject or not to and when to challenge the speakers or not among others.

4.3.1 Age of BLM speakers

The study demonstrated that the ages of members is varied from the young, middle-aged to the elderly.

''At Bunge la Mwananchi there is no restriction on participation. Anyone is allowed to contribute regardless of age'' (BLM participant, male P24, May 8, 2021).

To be able to speak one needed to be an adult. There were no children in the forums. From the findings, it was evident that anyone can speak in the BLM sessions regardless of their age. This result is reinforced by Okoth's claim (2012). BLM membership is broad, including numerous socioeconomic classes and groups, as well as gender, race, cultural, generational, and geographical variety, (Okoth 2012).

4.3.2 Gender of BLM speakers

>'Women don't attend Bunge la Mwanainchi debates. In my opinion I think that they are ignorant of what we do here or they have a negative perception of what happens in this forum. I think it's mostly fear based on ignorance. (BLM participant, male P08, May 19, 2021)

Study noted that of all the BLM gatherings there were no women attendees or chairpersons or followers or in leadership roles. The forums are heavily dominated by men. Men occupy all leadership roles and in numbers. From the study, BLM debates appeared as if it they were a male-only affair. As demonstrated above by one participant's observation, one reason could be negative perception of the BLM activities or fear of the nature of BLM activities or ignorance of what occurs in the BLM forums. During the FGD discussion, one of the chairpersons had this to say regarding lack of female presence or participation in the BLM forums.

''For the longest time that I have been a member of BLM and later as chairman, I have seen few women come to our forums. Those that do are usually female politicians who come to ask for votes or government employees who come to share information for example on health matters for instance a polio campaign other than that, I haven't seen any. However, we do have Community Based Organization (CBO) which is part of our activities. These CBOs have many women as members'' (Manyatta BLM Chair C03, May9, 2021)

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In the foregoing, it is safe to argue that whereas BLM is open and free for all, there is very limited female participation in the said forms. The means that the views expressed in the forums may not capture the interests of all residents of Kisumu central constituency as there are no contributions from the women. This in turn partially disproves the tenet of public spere theory of inclusivity and disregard of class as espoused by Habermas (2006).

4.3.3 Composition of BLM speakers

' We have witnessed occasions where someone would be from Homabay and stop briefly at our forum to listen to what the 'ground' is saying, [sometimes they contribute to the agenda while sometimes they just greet the participants and then proceed with his journey]. In other occasions, we have received participants from Siaya or Bondo walk in contribute to the debates; also, there have been instances where a Canadian came and participated in the discussions and even told us that they too have a similar thing back in Canada'' (Central Square BLM Chair C01, April 14, 2021).

Whereas BLM allows everyone to participate in the debates, the study noted that it is composed of mostly of men of diverse ethnicity, age, education background, religion, and culture. Members are mostly jobless youth, hawkers, bodaboda riders and cyclists, shoe shiners, activist, politicians, students and university lecturers. The findings also support the assertions of BLM (2010) that *Bunge la Mwanainchi* has grown in popularity among liberal students, university academics, lawmakers, laborers, farmers, and the jobless since the beginning of the new century.

One chairperson said this about the composition of the BLM.

''We welcome everybody to participate but if one wants to be a member and enjoy full benefits, one must register with us. Only eligible members can vote or vie for

leadership posts not participants. Right now, for example, we have membership of people of different background. Among our membership, there are retirees some are relatives to sitting MPs for instance the father to Anthony Oluoch. MP of Mathare Constituency. (Migosi BLM Chair C05, April 17, 2021).

4.3. 4 Language used by BLM participants

The data revealed that the languages used by the speakers are Swahili and English and partially Dholuo.

> ''Our membership cuts across the literate and semiliterate. One does need to be learned and well educated to be a member or participant in Bunge la Mwananchi forums. alone needs are ability to speak.''
>
> (Kondele BLM Chair C09, April 10, 2021)

Additionally,

> ''In some instances, members may want to contribute but they can't speak proper or English or Swahili, may times they just do it. Swahili and English are just part of the languages we use but one speaks in language they are most comfortable'' (BLM participant, male P11, April 7, 2021)

This discovery is corroborated by Bokros, et al. (2017), who postulated that candidates are expected to speak fluent English and Swahili. It is imperative to note nonetheless that due to literacy level of some members, they couldn't converse or understand Swahili or English, as such, they preferred the debates done in Dholuo. This hampered the quality of debate since the forums attracts every member of the public regardless of ethnicity.

4.3.5 Education and Expertise of BLM speakers

The study noted that the education level varied from literate to well educated. This was evident by the statements from BLM chairpersons during interviews and corroborated by participants during FGDs who indicated that you don't need to be educated to participate in BLM debates. Regarding the expertise of speakers, the data revealed that BLM's speakers vary from lawyers, hawkers, journalists, activists, businessmen, politicians.

> ''You don't need to be educated to participate in BLM debates. That is why we are here'' to break the ranks between the educated and the non-educated'' (BLM participant, male P07, April 19, 2021)

Moreover,

> '*'Bunge la Mwanainchi* is somewhere that anyone can come and be part of the discussion, education background notwithstanding. We have members who dropped in primary school and those who and university dons; but here, we are just participants'' (BLM participant, male, P11, June11, 2021)

According to the data collected during interview with a BLM chairperson, study revealed that:

> ''Some people don't understand English or Kiswahili properly but are eager for information. Since have information based on the media broadcasts, and prints, we retell the same information to these group of participants so that whoever doesn't have the know-how or understanding is in a position to do so'' (BLM participant P025, June 14, 2021).

Further, the data revealed that:

''During the Moi regime in the 1990s, opposition leaders would be arrested but Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) wouldn't broadcast who had been arrested. However, Daily Nation used report the arrests. Those who had gone to school like me would read the papers and then would come and tell the rest that so and so been arrested. But, most participants at this time did not understand Swahili so, I would read, absorb then translate in Dholuo. At the end of the day, people gathered here at the Central Square would leave the venue with knowledge of what was happening whether you knew Swahili or didn't'' (Central Square BLM Chair C01, April 14, 2021)

Based on these findings, it was apparent that BLM participants are both educated and uneducated. This finding is supported by Habermas in Mc Quail (2005) that observed that in public sphere, access to the space is free, and expression is guaranteed.

4.3.6 Governance of BLM speakers

The findings show that during the BLM proceedings, the chairman leads the deliberations and all contributions must be permitted by him. To contribute in the debate, members must raise their hands and wait for the chair to notice them and offer them the opportunity to contribute or float an agenda or make a remark or point of correction. There is no interruption of a speaker when he has the floor. All comments are to wait after speaker concludes his speech. The members are quick to correct the speaker on facts and in consistences and will even quote the law to back their statements.

''The chairman leads the deliberations. Members or participants raises their hands to contribute -it is only the chair that permits one to speak. Anyone can initiate a

conversation with the permission of the chair'' (BLM participant, male P18, May22, 2021).

One of the BLM participants indicated the following during an interview:

> '' We have our own leadership structure. We have a chairman, vice chairman, secretary, vice secretary, treasurer, organizing secretary, vice organizing secretary, and even security each with a specific role. We conduct our elections after every two years in accordance with the group Constitution but only registered members are eligible to participate in the elections''. (BLM participant male, P026, April 20, 2021).

This revelation contradicts Okoth's (2012) argument that the BLM lacks a well-defined institutional framework that would allow it to formulate and implement recommendations in a methodical way, including conversations with authorities for necessary funds. Based on the evidence shown above, it is clear that BLM adheres to the public sphere theory principle of contempt for class, status, or social standing.

4.4 Messages shared during the *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates in Kisumu Central Constituency

The study sought to determine the messages shared during the *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates in Kisumu Central Constituency.

4.4.1 Language used by BLM participants in passing the messages

The data revealed that the languages used to convey the varied messages are Swahili and English and partially Dholuo. The research noted that the participants are allowed to speak in language they are most comfortable in.

> ''We allow members to speak in language they are most comfortable in. We do not insist on a specific language to be used'' (BLM participant, P016, April 14, 2021)

This discovery is partially corroborated by Bokros, et al. (2017), who averred that participant are expected to speak fluent English and Swahili.

4.4.2 Types of messages discussed in the BLM forums

The data further revealed that socio-economic and political messages formed the content of BLM debates. However, political content formed the largest part of the messages discussed.

> ''When BLM started it was all about politics, but presently, we have gone beyond politics. We don't just talk about political messages but economics, social, religious, cultural, and traditional messages too'' (BLM participant, male P22, June 6, 2021).

During an FGD forum with BLM participants, data revealed that:

> ''Our biggest source of information is the newspapers which we read every day. Followed by the radio broadcasts. For example, I listen to radio stations with wider reach such as Radio Citizen or Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) that has diverse topics. I also listen to vernacular radio stations; we also get our information from TV broadcasts especially TV interviews and expert analysis in the morning shows. We then absorb all this and when we come here, we share the same with the people. we follow talks from the likes of political analysts such as Herman Manyora, Prof. Edward Kisian'gani, Mutahi Ngunyi, Dr. David Ndii among others''. (BLM participant, male P37, May 12, 2021).

The study showed that interviews involving political pundits such as Herman Manyora, Prof. Edward Kisian'gani, Mutahi Ngunyi, Dr. David Ndii among others were closely followed to get political insight. The study noted that BLM goes beyond discussing current political news and teach its members about Luo customs and traditions. So, in a sense, BLM has gone beyond the political social and economic issues. Furthermore, the study observed that in the beginning, politics dominated the talks in the BLM forums but today, there are messages on economics, social, religious, and cultural, and tradition of the Luo.

Evidence from this study thus shows that residents of Kisumu actively take part in BLM sessions because of this participation, they get information on socio and economic and political fronts making them aware of what is happening locally and nationally thus becoming being active participants in the promotion of access to information and political knowledge and increasing political participation and inclusion in Kisumu.

Whereas BLM sessions are open to all and sundry, the study noted that some participants have deliberately unverified information that antagonized other members. Their aim was to influence the participants by distorting facts while others lack objectivity in the discussions.

The study further noted that BLM speakers observe self-regulation or self-censorship. This, the study noted occurs when members recognize a strange face amidst them. According to the data, whenever the regular members notice a guest in its amidst, the speakers become cautious in its arguments and avoids contentious subjects or mentioning powerful names. Members resort to the use of proverbs and careful use of words. This, the data revealed is to insulate them from problems or attacks post-debate.

Additionally, the study further observed that BLM offered civic education on emerging issues both at the county and at the national level. For example, when the county government was collecting signatures for the Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Bill, 2020, BLM forums were involved to help with the collection of the signatures and to teach our members and the public about the gains of the Bill. Additionally, when the national government wanted to roll out the COVID19 vaccine, the government through the County Commissioner invited BLM membership for a meeting where the commissioner informed the BLM leaders of the benefits of the vaccine and sought their help in cascading the information for the vaccine uptake by its membership and the public at large.

4.4.3 Credibility of the messages shared in the BLM forums

In determining credibility of the speakers in BLM debates, the study observed that most of the content were premised on daily news from newspapers, TV, or radio. The study revealed that the credibility of the speaker is determined by the speaker's ability or inability to defend his source of information. If a speaker can't defend the source, then speech is disregarded or held in very low opinion or considered baseless but if it's verifiable or can be corroborated then the content is regarded in high esteem.

During an interview with one BLM chair, he said the following:

> ''Most of the information we share here at BLM is from the papers, Television, or radio. Sometimes you will find someone coming with information that he cannot defend. There is no newspaper that has reported the information, and there is no radio or TV report on the same, what was his source. For example, just the day, people said the former president Mwai Kibaki had allegedly died. But when you look in the newspaper or watch TV or listen to the radio, there is nothing there. But someone comes with this information here telling us that Kibaki is dead. When you challenge him to cite his source of information then the person is tongue-tied. It's at that point you learn this one is a propagandist. A liar of sorts or rumormonger. It cannot be that only him has this information. It's that point that people will tell that the participant is a rumor monger or propagandist. They will identify who says the truth and a liar. They will say that this one says the truth but this other one is a liar. For such people, we call them ''Jabelo'' (propagandist)''. (Central Square BLM Chair C01, April 14, 2021).

As revealed by one of the BLM chairpersons during an interview the study discovered that:

> ''We have and know participants who are propagandists and those who says the truth. To the truth peddler, people will listen very keenly and attentively. But for the propagandist they tell him ''enough''. The credibility of the speaker is determined by the speaker's ability or inability to defend the source of information. If a speaker can't defend the source, then speech is disregarded or held in very low opinion or considered baseless but if he can defend the source then it's held in high esteem and believed'' (Nyalenda BLM Chair C10, May 25, 2021).

The research noted that there is a lot of unverifiable content in BLM. Some speakers attend the sessions to test waters on behalf of others such as the government or a specific politician and even though the group claims it heavily relies on media reports, there are instances when rumor thrives more than accuracy especially during electioneering period where candidates tend to influence the electorate. The study further observed that any speaker who spoke needed to cite a source of their information one who was deemed a rumor monger or propagandist or 'Jabelo' as it is locally referred.

4.4.4 Source of the messages discussed in the BLM forums

The study noted that BLM's largest source of information is from the mainstream media reports. It also uses state/government announcements as source of information or content as well its reports from other well-placed individuals such as those who are privy to intelligence. and regurgitates the same to it members. what other mediums have reported. It is this information that the BLM debates or retells to its members who lacks access to radio, TV or newspapers or those members who are semi-illiterate or illiterate to understand the broadcast r read the dailies.

''Our biggest source of information is the newspapers which we read every day. Followed by the radio broadcasts. For example, I listen to radio stations with wider reach such as Radio Citizen or Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) that has diverse topics. I also listen to vernacular radio stations. We also get our information from TV broadcasts especially TV interviews and expert analysis in the morning shows. We then absorb all this and when we come here, we share the same with the people. we follow talks from the likes of political analysts such as Herman Manyora, Prof. Edward Kisian'gani, MutahiNgunyi, Dr. David Ndii among others''. (BLM participant, male P37, May 12, 2021).

Additionally, data revealed that all issues/topics merits a discussion in the BLM. There is no special message, however, the study noted that BLM doesn't produce any information on its own merit rather heavily rely on mainstream media for members.

''BLM started as a political outfit to fight bad governance and agitate for political freedom and other rights but today all topics, issues be it economic, social, religious, security are discussed in the debates'' (BLM participant, male P42, April 13, 2021).

Whereas it appears as if BLM is more of extension of the mainstream media, the study noted that there are instances where BLM speakers become source of information e.g., when contributing to national dialogue or when media seeks its opinion on a particular matter of national concern.

Additionally, there are occasions when an individual for example a personal aide to a politician has information that hasn't been published anywhere can share with the members but only if it can't jeopardize the safety of the speaker. In other instances, BLM get information from the estates that haven't been reported such as extreme violence, killings and

murders or rape or burglary or thefts or fires among others that the media haven't reported and they discuss the same and by doing so, that information is shared and gets to the mainstream media. This revelation became apparent doing an FGD discussion where a participant said as follows:

> ''Everyday, there are emerging issues and news from radio, television, social media and newspaper it is this information that we discuss n our forums. We don't just talk about political messages but economics, social, religious, cultural, and traditional messages too. We have gone beyond politics. We share this information or messages with those who didn't get a chance to watch or read news. Personally, I watch several channels e.g., citizen, NTV, KTN, etc. flipping channels to make sure that I get all the news everywhere else'' (BLM participant, male P08, April 12, 2021)

Study showed that BLM participants, sourced information from radio and TV broadcasts and newspapers. They in turn used their understanding of English or Swahili and their analytical abilities to share the messages in the BLM proceedings. That way, whoever is literate or lacked understanding, is in a position to know what was going on. This finding is affirmed by Okoth, (2012) who observed that BLM was among the notable networks that were undertaking collective mobilization for fulfilment of fundamental necessities, respect for basic rights, and democracy in the early 1990s.

It is also fair to assume that BLM is an information hub and a medium of information albeit as a secondary source as it heavily relies on mainstream media for information. It is also safe to assume that BLM has contributed towards the achievement of articles 33, 34, and 35 of the constitution which envisages freedom of expression, freedom of the media, and access to information respectively. More generally, these basic findings are consistent with most of

Habermas (1989) tenets of public sphere theory which included disregard for social position, common concern, inclusion, and public engagement.

The study further noted that BLM speakers observe self-regulation or self-censorship. This, the study noted occurs when members recognize a strange face amidst them. According to the data, whenever the regular members notice a guest in its amidst, the speakers become cautious in its arguments and avoids contentious subjects or mentioning powerful names. Members resort to the use of proverbs and careful use of words. This, the data revealed is to insulate them from problems or attacks post-debate.

This is corroborated by Bokros et al. (2017) who observed that the members of the People's Parliament advocate for good governance propelled by a desire for citizens to enjoy their rights and freedoms; they offer mass education to the residents of Kisumu concerning current political affairs, e.g. voter registration; they also act as watchdogs for the government since they criticize the government and advocate for change, thus preventing politicians from getting too comfortable, Bokros et al.(2017). The same finding by the study is supported by McNair, (2015) who noted that BLM push for constitutional and political reforms, as well as organizing protests against violation of civil liberties such as police brutality, violence against women, and price gouging according to McNair, (2015).

With regards to BLM being a primary source of information. The study noted that it contributes very little first-hand information as it depends heavily on other mainstream sources. The public sphere is a social space in which people may openly debate and identify society problems, and through that dialogue, influence political action. A public sphere is a fundamental prerequisite for mediating between the state and society, and in an ideal situation, it allows for democratic control of governmental actions. To enable for debate and the formation of public opinion, a record of state-related activities and legal proceedings must

be made public. Based on these findings, it is apparent that BLM upholds the public sphere theory essential element of common concern.

4.5Conclusion

This chapter looked at the nature of study participants in Kisumu central constituency. Under this objective, the study focused on the age of BLM participants, gender of BLM participants, The chapter also looked at the speaking criteria for members for members during BLM debates in Kisumu central constituency, under this objective, the chapter focused on the age of BLM speakers, composition of BLM members, language used by BLM participants, education and expertise of BLM speakers. Finally, the study looked at the messages shared during BLM debates in Kisumu central constituency. Under this objective, the chapter focused on language used by BLM participants in passing the messages, the types n of messages discussed in the BLM, the credibility of the messages discussed in the BLM forums and lastly the source of the messages discussed in the BLM forums. From the data collected, it is apparent that BLM shares a lot with regard to the tenets of public sphere theory. It also emerged that BLM speakers observe self-regulation or self-censorship. This, the study noted occurs when members recognize a strange face amidst them. According to the data, whenever the regular members notice a guest in its amidst, the speakers become cautious in its arguments and avoids contentious subjects or mentioning powerful names. Members resort to the use of proverbs and careful use of words. This, the data revealed is to insulate them from problems or attacks post-debate.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, summary of findings, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further research are presented. The findings organized into categories based on the research questions.

5.2 Summary of Findings

Broadly, the research revealed that BLM is a key element in Kisumu Central Constituency 's political and democratic processes. This is based largely on the fact that it offers a platform for political engagement, communication and interaction among different political actors.

The findings demonstrate that participants are involved in communicative action typical of the public sphere because of the similarities depicted during their discussion about politics during BLM debates. This is influenced by three factors: (1) political decision-making process, (2) advocacy, and (3) source of political information.

Based on data generated during the fieldwork, it is evident that the residents of Kisumu Central Constituency use BLM as a supply of political information and as a communicative instrument to engage their political leaders, share information, advocate for good governance and equity in sharing public resources and civic education on societal, economic, and political issues. BLM is an information feeder.

The study further discovered that BLM became popular due to the need to access information from the media which was under firm control of the State. Moreover, when BLM started, everyone could sit at the central square especially late in the evening, but since some members came from far places and could not get to the site on time, some members decided to open a branch in the estates and villages. BLM soon had a branch in Kondele, Manyatta, Migosi, Kaloleni, Nyalenda among others.

With its accessibility, BLM enables the residents to engage in lively and interactive debates and activities which also influences their voting patterns and political affiliations. Additionally, BLM has increased availability of political information and by default participation and knowledge among the residents of Kisumu Central Constituency use through its engagements.

On its effectiveness in political decision making, the study revealed that BLM has influences in local politics. This, the study revealed that they do so by critiquing county assemblies and the county government leadership. The study also observed that BLM qualifies as an alternative medium of information. This is based on the fact that it challenges established and institutional politics, and advocate change in society.

Furthermore, BLM has created an open place where locals may gather and discuss concerns, as well as improve the quality of democratic society in Kisumu Central Constituency, which, according to public sphere theory is reliant on private persons to communicate and deliberate. The data also shows that three dimensions (structural, representation and interactivity), which are critical in modern public sphere, were partly manifested through the BLM interactions in Kisumu Central Constituency. It is evident that BLM promotes freedom of speech among its users as well as promotion of inclusiveness which in itself is dynamic. Moreover, through the diverse issues discussed in BLM, its participants principally in Kisumu Central Constituency have been able to set different agenda and be exposed to diversity of divergent views. This is crucial in the growth of political communication and democracy in Kisumu.

Further, by recognition by both the national and county governments, and participation of active and retired politicians in the debates have put BLM at a position of credibility. As such, the matters discussed may not necessarily be dismissed as gossip but there is relevance and significance.

The study noted that BLM is an information hub that cascades information, educates and also advocates for fairness and equity from both the national and county governments. Notably, it's a forum where people gather to listen, contribute, analyze daily occurrences so as to be informed or educated and/or to advocate for human rights while agitating for fairness and the rule of law.

The findings show BLM enhances political participation because it offers opportunities for expressing opinions, and for engaging directly with their political actors, including leaders and opinion shapers. BLM helps advance political inclusion as it is used as a political tool and platform for political communication by the participants.

In the beginning, BLM was known as a movement that criticized the Government and demanded better governance. However, as the research findings revealed, it appears that the objects of the BLM have somewhat changed and are mostly an information feeder rather than a strong critique of the Government agenda and activities. Even though BLM tries to be autonomous, the study revealed that being formally registered as an organization means, it's controlled by the state because it must operate within the dictums of the state laws. Nonetheless, the data further indicate that anyone regardless of gender, race, color or status can take part in the sessions even without a membership.

The data further revealed that BLM is currently recognized by the national and he county government and are recognized by the county government as a s a stakeholder in county affairs especially with regard to advocacy and information sharing.

5.3 Conclusions of the Study

This study aimed to contribute to knowledge by examining Public Sphere Theory in the context of *Bunge la Mwananchi* in Kisumu Central Constituency. To do so, the study had three objects: to establish the nature of *Bunge la Mwananchi* participants in Kisumu Central Constituency, to establish the speaking criteria for members during *Bunge la Mwananchi*

debates in Kisumu Central Constituency and to determine the messages/content shared during the *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates in Kisumu Central Constituency.

Grounded on the data gathered, and in line with the first objective, there search observed that BLM allows anyone to participate in its debates. That it allows interested members of the public regardless of class, age, gender, social standing to participate. This participation doesn't follow any specific order as it disregards class. This is to say that BLM meets the Habermas, essential element of ''every contributor having an equal opportunity to initiate the discussion, ask questions, discuss, examine, and offer an agenda. It is evident that BLM as a form of public sphere upholds public sphere theory tenet of disregard of class, status or social standing.

In assessing of objective two, the study revealed that for participants to contribute to the conversation there's a guide to be followed, the discussions are guided by the chairman. As much as many people attend the sessions, not all are interested in current affairs others are purely interested in political information and often will want the chair to guide the discussion towards politics even if the matter on the floor was as the is a social one. The credibility of political information on BLM is also in doubt. For example, not every speaker speaks from a point of authority since the information is rehashed from mainstream media, there is distortion and exaggeration by the speakers. The speakers exaggerate on a matter, as some members may have not been privy to the information due to lack of primary media accessibility. BLM upholds public sphere theory tenet/condition of inclusivity in that anyone can speak regardless of the age, gender, education, or social status.

Regarding objective three, the study concludes that BLM doesn't generate any additional or new information to members. Its primary activity is to retell the information gained from mainstream media including newspapers, radio, and television interviews ad debates among others. BLM's content is largely determined with what is trending in the mainstream media

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including radio, newspaper and television reports. To some extent, BLM offers new information to the media which is reported by the press but only in few instances e.g., during interviews. To determine the messages shared during the *Bunge la Mwananchi* debates in Kisumu Central Constituency, the data showed that all topics can be discussed including socio-economic, cultural life of the Luo and political messages remain the largest topic. This is consistent with Habermas essential element popular concern.

It is also safe to assume that BLM espouses the normative conditions or essential elements of Public Sphere as envisaged by Habermas' including disregard for class, popular concern and inclusiveness and public participation. Furthermore, the data demonstrate that BLM is a form of Public Sphere theory that allows participants regardless of gender or age, education, status to take part in the BLM sessions.

In conclusion, BLM can be said to be observing Habermas' normative conditions of the public realm; including the aspect of class, as well as inclusivity, as seen by public debates between the young and the old, the poor and the wealthy, the educated and the uneducated. Therein though lies a small challenge in that almost all the BLM chairpersons and attendees are male. The reasons nonetheless, for female absence aren't debated, but the excuse of lack of interest like the study revealed. Second, a common concern was clear through the political issues discussed on BLM. Inclusivity, which is the third precondition, however, seemed to be a challenge.

Whereas, many of the participants sampled showed they regularly attend BLM sessions, not every resident of Kisumu central constituency takes part in the BLM sessions. This exclusion on political discourse on BLM makes the BLM short of meeting Habermas's precondition of inclusivity. Immaturity, lack of knowledge, hatred, and ethnicity are also seemed to exclude other members of the Kisumu central constituency from part of the deliberations.

5.4 Recommendations

Broadly speaking, BLM can be of use to the devolved governments such as Kisumu County and other Counties in Kenya to effectively conduct public participation or in civic education on public policies as well as a community mobilization tool regarding the President's Big 4 Agenda (which are food security, affordable housing, universal health care, manufacturing and Job creation) and Vision 2030 Blueprint.

With respect to objective one, there is a need for the BLM to be empowered on the importance of discursive politics that is free of tribalism, hatred, immaturity, and ignorance so that the participants learn to air their views responsibly so as not to polarize the county by inciting each other. Equally, the BLM members should be educated on better ways to use during political debates in the BLM forums.

With regard to objective two, there is a need for the BLM forums to adopt a standard language that can be used by all the participants during their contribution to the debates. This can be Swahili language as one doesn't need education/schooling to speak the language unlike English. With the adoption of the common language that is understood by everyone, members who are non-Luos will not feel ostracized when others contribute in Dholuo. This in turn will attract larger number as opposed to the small audience it currently enjoys.

In regard to objective three, BLM participants need to be empowered on how to identify fake news and propaganda in their discussions especially during their contributions, so that members don't advance propaganda and fake stories.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

1. There is need for further studies on women participation in *Bunge la Mwananchi* activities in Kisumu Central Constituency and why they don't participate in the BLM.

2. There is need for further studies on BLM choice of Dholuo language during debates and how this limits non-Luo members from freely speaking or contributing to the debates.

3. There is need for further studies on the use of fake news/stories and propaganda as part of the content shared by BLM participants in Kisumu Central Constituency.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the summary of findings, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

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APPENDICES
Appendix A   :Introductory Letter to the Participant & Informed Consent Form

Dear Respondent,

My name is Paul Ohaga. I am a student at Maseno University, undertaking a Postgraduate degree in Masters of Communication and Media Studies. I'm collecting data for my research whose objective is to examine *the Public Sphere Theory and its bearing on Political Decision making among Bunge la Mwananchi participants in Kisumu* Constituency is Central Constituency.

I kindly request you to participate in this study. The exercise will take 30 minutes of your time. The information that you provide during the study will be kept confidential. By participating in this study and answering the questions, you will help to increase my understanding of the Public Sphere Theory and its bearing on Political Decision making among *Bunge la Mwananchi* participants in Kisumu Constituency is Central Constituency.

You have been chosen to take part in this study; however, your participation is entirely optional, and you will have the freedom to refuse to take part or respond to questions that make you uncomfortable. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any moment if you change your mind about participating. The information you provide in answer to this interview, as well as any other information you provide, will be kept strictly confidential and used exclusively for academic reasons.

Declaration of the Respondent

I have understood the purpose of this study and therefore consent voluntarily to participate as a respondent.

Signature of the Respondent: --

Date: --------------------------------------

Area of Data Collection (location): ---

Appendix B   : Interview Schedule

Interview Questions For selected BLM Chairpersons/leaders

1. How do you describe *Bunge la Mwananchi?*

2. How effective do you consider *Bunge la Mwananchi* in political decision making in Kisumu Constituency is Central Constituency*?*

3. What kind of messages are shared in *Bunge la Mwananchi* forums?

4. There has been a proliferation of Bunge la Mwananchi as an alternative medium of information that can shape political decisions; what do you contribute to this?

5. Besides the media, what are your other sources of information that form discussion at the BLM forums?

6. How effective are the messages shared during Bunge la Mwananchi forums in making a political decision in Kisumu Central Business District?

7. What are the credibility criteria used in evaluating speakers as sources of information at Bunge la Mwananchi on making political decisions?

8. Research by various scholars, especially on BLM, has categorized it as an alternative media. What's you take on this?

9. How alternative is BLM as an alternative medium of information that shapes political decisions in Kisumu Constituency is Central Constituency?

10. What's the procedure of membership recruitment for BLM?

11. Interview Questions For selected BLM attendees

12. How effective do you consider Bunge la Mwananchi in political decision making in Kisumu Constituency is Central Constituency*?*

13. How do you describe Bunge la Mwananchi?

14. How often do you attend BLM forums?

15. According to Communication Authority, there are at least 319 radio stations, 83 free-to-air TV channels; six daily newspapers; twenty monthly magazines, and 11 regular weeklies; why do you think some Kenyans rely on the informal Bunge la Mwananchi to make political decisions?

16. What is it that BLM offers that the media mentioned above platforms don't?

17. How do you determine the credibility of a speaker as sources of information at Bunge la Mwananchi?

18. How would you describe the credibility of messages or information shared in these forums?

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Appendix C   Focus Group Discussion Guide/Schedule

Focus Group Discussion Questions For selected BLM Chairpersons/leaders

1. What's your role as a leader of *Bunge la Mwananchi*?
2. What is attractive in BLM that would make you attend the BLM?
3. What determines whether you attend the BLM forum or not?
4. How would you describe BLM?
5. What kind of messages are shared in *Bunge la Mwananchi?*
6. There has been a proliferation of *Bunge la Mwananchi* as an alternative medium of information that can shape political decisions. What do you think about this?
7. How do you determine the credibility of speakers as sources of information at Bunge la Mwananchi?
8. Who and what sets the agenda for Bunge la Mwananchi?
9. What do you think about the credibility of speakers of BLM?
10. Focus Group Discussion Questions For selected BLM Attendees
11. What's you take on BLM in influencing the political decision in Kisumu Central Constituency
12. How often do you attend BLM forms?
13. What is attractive in BLM that would make you attend the BLM, yet there are many media out there?
14. What influences your decision to attend the BLM forum?
15. How would do you describe BLM?
16. What kind of messages are shared in Bunge la Mwananchi?
17. There has been a proliferation of Bunge la Mwananchi as an alternative medium of information that can shape political decisions. What do you contribute to this?
18. How do you determine the credibility of speakers as sources of information at Bunge la Mwananchi?
19. Who   and   what   sets   the   agenda   for   Bunge   la   Mwananchi?

Appendix D Maseno University Communication and Media Department Letter of Recommendation

TO

THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

P. O. Box 30623, 00100 Nairobi,

KENYA

23/12/2021

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: RECOMMENDATION LETTER FOR OHAGA M. PAUL

Dear Sir/Madam,

The above subject matter regards.

This is to inform you that Paul Mboya Ohaga of ID NO: 22694220 is a student at Maseno University, undertaking a Postgraduate degree in Master of Communication and Media Studies, Department of Communication and Media Technology, School of Arts and Social Sciences. As a Master student, he is required to undertake a Project or Thesis as part of his study.

In the forgoing, I would wish to indicate that having successfully gone through the course work and having satisfactorily met all the requirements for him to undertake his Project writing, the student is ready to start data collection. It is for this reason that I write to you to permit hm to proceed with this crucial exercise.

The title of his research is *'Examination of the Public Sphere Theory in the context of Bunge la Mwanainchi in Kisumu Central Constituency'*. Research site will be Kisumu Central Constituency in Kisumu County and the duration of study will be three months.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Emojon'g Omukule, (PhD)

Head of Department, Communication and Media Technology

Maseno University