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Citizens' Behaviour and Accountability: The Power of Social Capital in Sub-Saharan African Local Governments

Poul Maxwell Ogentho[a,b], John C. Munene[c], Nixon Kamukama[d], and Joseph Mpeera Ntayi[e]

[a]Corporate services, Office of the Auditor General Uganda, Kampala, Uganda; [b]Graduate studies, Makerere University Business School, Kampala, Uganda; [c]Director PhD programme, Makerere University Business School, Kampala, Uganda; [d]Faculty of Science, Academic Affairs, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Mbarara, Uganda; [e]Faculty of Economics, Energy and Management Science, Makerere University Business School, Kampala, Uganda

ABSTRACT

The study attempts to explain the power of social capital in the association between citizens' behaviour and accountability in local governments. This study is anchored on social capital theory because previous studies have largely used citizenship, agency and stewardship theories to explain accountability. Data relating to the predictor constructs were found to be significant predictors of accountability. Data were collected using standard closed ended questionnaires administered to citizens who were both the unit of inquiry and unit of analysis. This article urges citizens to leverage on social capital to garner critical mass, as they come together to demand accountability. These study findings present both policy and managerial implications which we discuss.

KEYWORDS

Citizens' behaviour; social capital; local governments; accountability; Sub-Saharan Africa

Introduction

Citizens feel frustrated that they are not empowered to fight the lacking transparency and answerability in government (Muhumuza, 2016). They denounce public officers for failure to remain accountable for entrusted public funds. For example, in the 4 years, Shs. 12.15 billion ($3.3 million), were not accounted for by accounting officers of district and urban local governments (Office of the Auditor General of Uganda, 2015–2018). Again, the Inspector General of Government of Uganda report reveals that Shs. 10 billion were recovered from local government officers who had previously failed to account for public funds (Inspector General of Government of Uganda, 2015–2018).

In this regard, a number of empirical and conceptual studies on accountability exist (Bovens, 2006; Briscoe, 2009; Cunningham, 1972; Dauti, 2016; Klitgaard, 1988; Kwemarira, Ntayi, & Munene, 2019; Sejjaaka, 2010). These researches have largely been done on the direct association between citizenship behaviour and accountability generally, but they seem to have paid less attention to the mediating role of social capital in this relationship. Again, related studies on accountability have largely been conducted in America, Asia and Europe. Scanty researches exist on these constructs in Sub-Saharan Africa particularly on local governments of Uganda. Theoretically, previous scholars have largely used Agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), Stewardship theory (Donaldson & Davis, 1991, 1993) and Citizenship theory which particularly postulate the importance of the role of citizens in influencing accountability (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). This study invokes the power of Social capital theory (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993) that demonstrates the strength citizens have in coming together to pursue the common objective of accountability.

Citizens are expected to demand accountability from managers for shared resources (Coelho & Von Lieres, 2010) yet Ugandan citizens feel frail to do so. The public has resorted to complaining rather than taking action despite their constitutional obligation to demand for openness and responsible management of entrusted government funds (Government of Uganda, 1995). This is a reflection of lack of ownership, non-assertiveness and weak participation of the citizens in community governance (Kwemarira et al., 2019). With this kind of behaviour, citizens simply legitimize elite public officers to usurp their powers over ownership of public resources (Briscoe, 2009; Locke & Spender, 2011). Failure of the citizens to fully enforce their constitutional rights over public resources has left them vulnerable to exploitation by agent public officers.

Thus, using Social capital theory, this article examines the power of social capital theory in the relationship between citizens' behaviour and accountability in Uganda using data from district and local government

CONTACT Poul Maxwell Ogentho ogenthomaxwell@gmail.com Corporate services, Office of the Auditor General Uganda, P.O.Box 7083, Kampala, Uganda.

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councils. The rest of the article is structured as follows: it begins with theoretical underpinning of this study, followed by literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and limitations and concludes with implications of the study.

Theoretical underpinning

Social capital theory

Social capital theory assumes that social relationships are resources that can lead to the development and accumulation of human capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). This theory is seen as any feature of a social relationship that yields productive benefits. It highlights the relevance of collective action for social good which entails the willingness to subordinate personal interests to those of the larger society. It pays attention to the norms, obligations and information that develop within a network of citizens, allowing them to effectively pursue common goals (Coleman, 1988). Hence, social capital focuses on human activities that take place outside monetized markets and also provides a basis for trust within the society (Díez, 2013).

Literature review

Citizens' behaviour and accountability

According to Kluvers and Tippett (2010) an individual's behaviour is shaped by values expected to be derived by the individual as a result of that behaviour. In this study, citizens' behaviour dimensions are ownership of public resources, participation and assertiveness. Ownership is a power that can be used to either support or oppose management depending on its concentration (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1980). It can be observed that ownership behaviour links with accountability, reflecting that the behaviour of one who feels one has a stake in something varies tremendously from one that is unconcerned. Given ownership, citizens can exercise control over those holding public office (Bovens, 2006). This is emphasized in the International Standard for Supreme Audit Institutions (ISSAI) (2011) which reflects general consensus that citizens can hold government accountable since their ability is critical in enforcing accountability (Baimyrzaeva & Kose, 2014). The other aspect of citizens' behaviour is participation seen where individuals take part in decision-making in institutions, programmes and environments that affect them (Wandersman & Florin, 2000). It focuses on the involvement of citizens in decision-making, which influences their community. Pocock and Beiner (1995) proceeded to emphasize that participation makes citizens concerned with the purpose of life as they join others in decision-making for the benefit of their community. Assertive behaviour is another dimension that enables persons to act in the best interest of the community and responsible use of public resources (Rakos, 1991). Public assertiveness should stretch to the urge to defend rights against public property even if it poses risks of loss of reinforcement or even punishments (Rich & Schroeder, 1976). Based on this empiricism, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H_1 Citizens' behaviour and accountability are positively related.

Citizens' behaviour and social capital

The vehicle that drives citizens into coming together is generally recognised as social capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). When individual citizens participate in matters of the community, different communities are brought together towards a common interest that promotes bridging among them. An assertive community comes together to galvanize efforts to defend their rights in pursuit of their common goals. A society that lacks assertiveness is prone to being pulled apart by simply scare rhetoric. Considerable emphasis has been made by various studies explaining the success of community collective action arising from the presence of bonding, bridging and networking social capital (Dahal & Adhikari, 2008). Despite these, none of the studies linked social capital to the behavioural aspects of citizens that constitute the community.

Earlier studies tended to downplay the behavioural aspect of the people of the communities. This is the gap which this study seeks to bridge through providing empirical evidence linking citizens' behaviour to social capital. The study argues that enabling citizens' behaviour such as ownership, participation and assertiveness facilitates the existence of social capital in such communities (Portes, 1998). The researcher, therefore, proposes the following hypothesis:

H_2 Citizens' behaviour and social capital are positively related.

Social capital and accountability

Gloppen (2003) states that accountability is concerned with the relationship between one with a right or a legitimate claim and the agent responsible for fulfilling the right. Coming together of the community is what generates

a formidable force that pushes for improvement in accountability (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). Social capital becomes a vehicle for bringing people together (World Bank, 2007). Putnam (1993) asserts that social capital involves networks, norms and trust that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit. Social capital involves human activities that take place outside monetized markets, within households or in interactions with individuals living in other households (Díez, 2013). This is further alluded to by Munene, Schwartz, and Kibanja (2005) considering social capital as the sharing of a set of cognitions such as beliefs, values, attitudes, expectations and knowledge by members of a community. These are intentionally sustained through structures like roles, rules and networks. This implies that social capital links well with accountability; a social value needed to sanction non-transparent public officers with the communities coming together (Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2006). This similar study envisages that social capital could be important to induce positive change in the behaviour of citizens in demand for transparent handling of public resources from public officers. Through creating networks among communities, people generate bonding through creating social ties that cut across differences such as classes, race, gender, disability and religion that act as a basis for accountability. Social capital brings persons together for the good of communities (Healey, Cars, Madanipour, & De Magalhaes, 2017).

According to Munene (2009), a community with social capital uses most of its physical, financial and human capital resources for the purpose for which they are intended, implying being accountable. This implies that without social capital, the rest of the other capitals may not achieve optimal utilization. Similarly, from the sharing of sets of cognitions, citizens exercise their individual rights and gain more strength in coming together in organised setups such as civil interest groups, political setups and pressure groups required for enforcement of transparency and accountability. It can also be construed from Nyang'oro (2000) that there could be a linkage between society formations and accountability. When he contends that the more members of a society organise themselves into groups (generation of social capital) to advance their particular interest, the less likely that the state can function in an autonomous and unaccountable manner, he implies that coming together promotes accountability. It can further be drawn that citizens' action through social capital can counter the impunity of those who govern, termed public agents (Díez, 2013). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_3 Social capital and Accountability are positively related.

Social capital mediates relationship between citizens' behaviour and accountability

According to Egan (2009) when citizens take ownership of public resources, participate in public financial management activities and pursue it assertively, this promotes accountability. This is better done when individual citizens come together to create a critical mass of publics with the same behavioural characteristics demanding the change, thus introducing the critical role of social capital in the relationship. For citizens' power to translate into the force that compels public officers to account, it should be massive and beyond what they can ordinarily dismiss without consequences. Participation may influence accountability when the individual citizens come together and take part in decision-making. However, this individual participation only becomes effective when pursued by massively connected citizens through the leverage of social capital (Pocock & Beiner, 1995) such as enhancing their sanctioning power over public officers who fail to perform. Romzek and Dubnick (1987) observe that district governments criticized for poor accountability practices had their responsibility enhanced through public participation; citizens' mobilization successfully pressurized management to act more accountably (Coelho & Von Lieres, 2010). Responsible citizens attain consensus and act together in sanctioning public officers who fail to account to expectations. This provides the basis for answerability on public resources (Díez, 2013). This article helps to bridge that gap and articulates the essential role of social capital in the interaction between citizens' behaviour and accountability especially in the context of local governments. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_4 The relationship between citizens' behaviour and accountability is mediated by social capital.

Methodology

Research design, population and sample size

The study took a cross-sectional and quantitative research survey design to test the set hypotheses (Saunders, 2011). The researchers adopted this approach as the most appropriate method of data collection because cross-sectional studies are perceived to be relatively inexpensive, faster and easier to conduct, useful for generating and clarifying hypotheses and can lay the groundwork for decisions about follow-up studies (Sekaran, 2000). Previous research supports the reliability and validity of the self-report measures (Lechner, Bolman, & Van Dijke, 2006).

The study performed EFA on the data and then CFA was carried out following guidelines by Anderson and

Gerbing (1988) to construct the CFA and SEM models. Only those dimensions and respective items that were retained at EFA for each variable were used to carry out a CFA using Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS). The researchers then tested the set hypotheses. The sample in this study consisted of 511 randomly selected citizens from 4 major local government councils (representing District, Municipal, Town and Sub-County councils). This was derived from 127 local governments across Uganda. All respondents were chosen randomly from these local governments regardless of age, gender, marital status, ethnic group, and level of education.

Measurement of variables

A self-administered questionnaire was the main instrument to elicit responses. All item scales were adopted from previous research studies: Okafor and Osuagwu (2006) recommend adapting item scales used in previous studies because of their wide item scale reliability and validity. Citizens' behaviour was measured in terms of ownership, participation and assertiveness (Munene et al., 2005). Social capital was conceptualised as networking, bridging and bonding (Munene, 2009). Accountability was operationalised in terms of transparency, accessibility, credibility, obligation, judgement and sanctioning (Egan, 2009; Hernandez, 2012). The measurement items for the three constructs were anchored on a 5-point Likert scale.

Validity and reliability

The researchers tested the validity of instruments using Cronbach alpha coefficients (Sekaran, 2000). The Cronbach alpha coefficients for the study constructs were found to be 0.864, 0.902 and 0.828 for Citizens' behaviour, Social capital and Accountability, respectively (Cronbach, 1951). These exceeded the minimum acceptance value of 0.7 as recommended by Nunnally (1978). This signified a high reliability of the instrument to be based on in testing of research instruments (Sarantakos, 2012). The content validity index (CVI) for Citizens' behaviour, Social capital and Accountability was 0.786, 0.800 and 0.884, respectively. These were in line with the recommended threshold of 0.7, hence, appropriate for the study as per Table 1.

Table 1. Validity and reliability of the instruments.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Content Validity Index
Citizens' Behaviour	0.864	0.786
Social Capital	0.902	0.800
Accountability	0.828	0.884

Source: Primary data.

Common method bias

Common method bias was addressed in this study by collecting data from four respondents per local government council. Again, the potential effects of response pattern biases were reduced by incorporating negatively worded items on the questionnaire (Hinkin, 1995). The logic is that negatively worded items are like cognitive "speed bumps" that require respondents to engage in a more controlled as opposed to automatically cognitive processing. It counters inflation or deflation in the validity of conclusions about the relationships between the study variables. Measures that were common in the predictor, mediator and dependent variables were eliminated. The items meant to measure these variables had to be simplified. This was to reduce the possibility of biases in the instruments by keeping questions simple, specific, concise and avoiding double-barrelled questions (Tourangeau, Rips, Rasinski, 2000).

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

EFA was performed by running principal component analysis as the extraction method using Varimax with Kaiser Normalization to explore factor structure of the study constructs. This helped to summarize variables from the constructs with multiple questions into more meaningful and interpretable factors. Besides, EFA also enabled to test for validity of the study items. This explored the factor structure of citizens' behaviour, social capital and accountability. It was necessary to make the constructs with multiple questions precise, more meaningful and interpretable. The EFA results indicated that factor items loaded well on the three constructs with communality values above 0.5, higher than the suggested minimum estimate of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), demonstrating evidence of convergent validity.

Next, CFA was performed on the data after EFA. AMOS 20 was used to test whether the dimensions of a theoretically grounded model of variables fitted in the study data based on model fit indices (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010). It was to confirm whether the factors extracted converged as manifest variables. CFA was carried out based on guidelines of Anderson and Gerbing (1988) to construct the CFA and SEM models. Those dimensions and respective items retained at EFA for each variable (Citizens behaviour, Social capital and

Accountability) were used to carry out a CFA using Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS). The items for each respective construct were further reduced after conducting CFA (Figures 1–3).

The model fit indices were all above the required threshold of .95 for the fit indices and the RMSEA were less than .060 cut-off points. This, therefore, means that the measurement model yielded acceptable fit indices

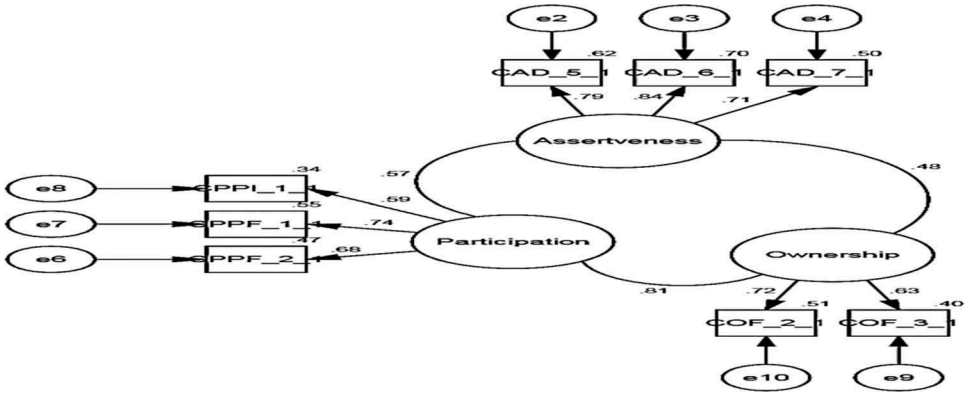


Figure 1. Measurement model of citizens' behaviour.

CMIN = 30.377; df = 17; *P* = .024; CMIN/df = 1.787; GFI = .986; NFI = .977; RFI = .962; IFI = .960; TLI = .983, CFI = .989; AGFI = .970; RMSEA = .039; AVE = .5134; N = 511.

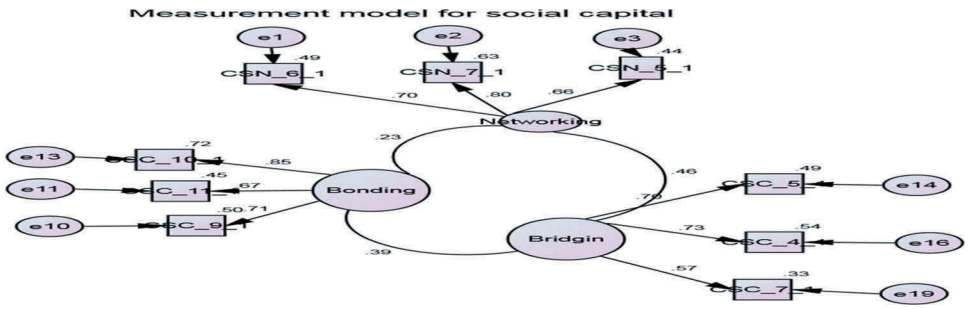


Figure 2. Measurement model for social capital.

Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = .973; Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .950; Relative Fit Index (RFI) = .930; Increment Fit Index (IFI) = .972; Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = .960; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 1.000; Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = .954; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .049; Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = .511.

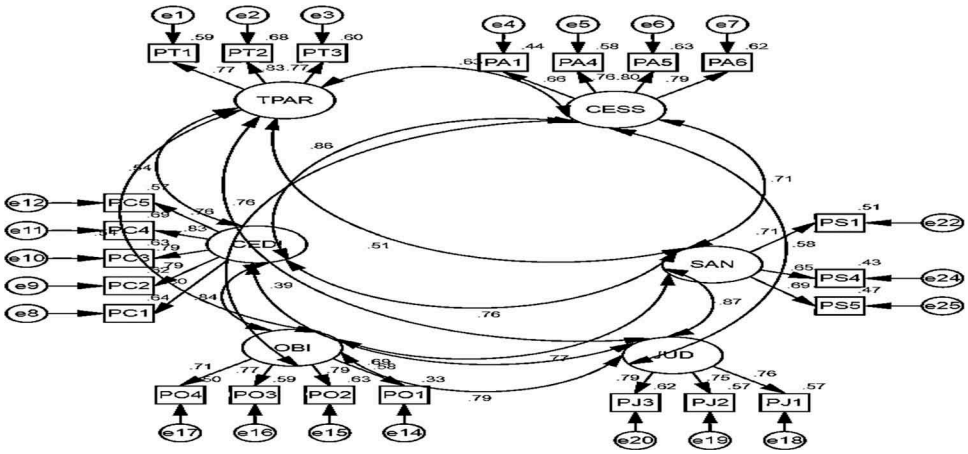


Figure 3. Measurement model for accountability.

Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = .901; Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .906; Relative Fit Index (RFI) = .989; Increment Fit Index (IFI) = .934; Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = .921; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .954; Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = .971; Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = .569; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .055.

(Hu & Bentler, 1995), suggesting a good representation of citizens' behaviour, social capital and accountability items, respectively, retained after CFA.

Structural equation modelling

Structural equation modelling test using Amos 20 was done to test the research hypotheses following a two-stage SEM (Anderson & Gerbin, 1988). The first stage involved estimating a measurement model using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and the second stage involved estimating the structural model. In the first step, the manifest indicators (survey scale items) were subjected to CFA allowing each construct to correlate with every other construct in the model. This step examines the measurement model for fit. If the measurement model provides a good fit, then the researcher can proceed to step two which examines the hybrid model comprising both the measurement parameters and the structural paths between the latent constructs. The measurement model provides the baseline of fit to which a hybrid model is compared in step two. The same fit index cut-offs from CFA apply to SEM. If, and only if, a good fit is ascertained in step two, an examination of path coefficients as tests of the hypotheses is undertaken. In the current study, two sets of alternative models were analysed, one without mediation and another one with mediation (as seen in Figure 4).

Additionally, SEM was selected because it provides more accurate and proper results for mediation analyses. It is superior to the approach proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) which relies on using four separate regression equations. Regression models define each variable as either a cause or an effect, while variables in a causal framework can be causes and effects at the same time (MacKinnon & Fairchild, 2009); therefore regression analyses are inaccurate in estimating the mediating effect. Additionally, SEM allows for the simultaneous estimation of a series of independent regression equations (Hair et al., 2010).

Hypothesis testing

This was performed to determine the association between citizens' behaviour, social capital and accountability. The results below reveal that the study variables are positively associated with each other as demonstrated in Table 2.

The research results above show a significant positive relationship between citizens' behaviour and social capital (β = .220, t-value = 6.797, $p < .05$). Furthermore, results confirm that there is a significant positive association between citizens' behaviour and accountability (β = .493, t-value = 12.278, $p < .05$). Again, the findings established a positive significant association between social capital and accountability (β = .219, t-value = 4.172, $p < .05$). Finally, the research results predicted and confirmed that social capital mediates the relationship between citizens' behaviour and accountability (partial mediation) (β = .162, t-value = 3.627, $p < .05$).

Results

Demographics

The study findings indicated that 511 respondents were responsive. The profile of the respondents indicates that females constituted 52% while males were at 48%. Most of the citizens (71.1%) were between the ages of 26 and 49; this was followed by those between 18 and 25 years constituting 15.3%; and the least (13.7%) were

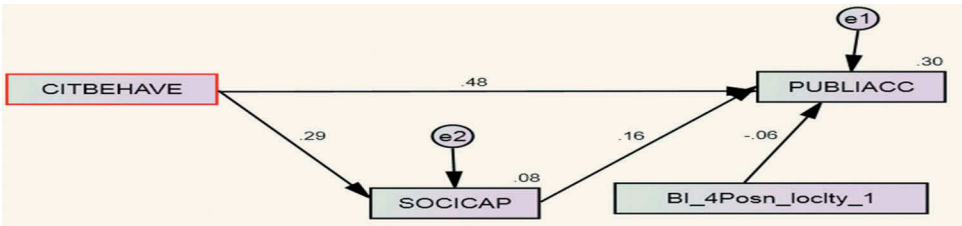


Figure 4. Structural model for accountability.
Citbehave is citizens behaviour; Socicap is social capital; Publiacc is accountability while BI_4Posn_Locity_1 is position of respondents in the locality.

Table 2. Regression weights of the unmediated and mediated paths.

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Social capital <–– Citizens behaviour	.220	.032	6.797	***	Supported
Accountability <–– Citizens Behaviour	.493	.040	12.278	***	Supported
Accountability <–– Social capital	.219	.053	4.172	***	Supported
Accountability <–– Scapital < – Cbehavior	.162	.021	3.627	***	Supported

above 50. People with disability comprised 9% of the total number of respondents. In terms of education levels, the majority of the respondents (32.9%) had Bachelor's degrees; 26.8% were diploma holders; 16.6% held certificates; 11.4% were at secondary level of education; followed by those with postgraduate qualifications (2.0%); and the least respondents (2.0%) with primary level of education. Most of the respondents (36.0%) came from the Northern region, followed by those from the Western region (25%), while those from Central constituted 20.2%, and the least responsive (18%) were from the Eastern region of Uganda.

Discussion

Citizens' behaviour and accountability

H_1: The results tested and confirmed that there is a significant positive relationship between citizens' behaviour and accountability. This implies that when citizens adjust their behaviour to embrace ownership of public property, this enhances the initiative to participate in a responsible and assertive manner. The pressure they mount pushes public officers to provide public answers about citizenry resources. This resonates well with Kluvers and Tippett (2010) who argue that the individual's behaviour is shaped by values expected to be derived by the individual as a result of that behaviour. This is demonstrated when citizens take ownership of public assets and officers are accountable for government funds.

Social capital and accountability

H_2: This stated that social capital is significantly and positively related to accountability. This hypothesis was tested and confirmed. As publics' network, bridge and bond, they pressure public officers to commit to the obligation to be transparent. In this regard, citizens connecting enables them unite to form a common objective particularly transparency in using public money. Social capital provides the vehicle for pushing public officers to embrace openness in the execution of work for the citizenry. This finding relates well with the study by Seibert, Kraimer and Laden (2001) who argue that networks influence a range of individual behaviours in the African setting, particularly Uganda. These research results are in line with the social capital theory which assumes that social relationships are resources that can lead to the development and accumulation of human capital. These findings demonstrate that social relationship yields productive benefits as it compels public servants to offer answers on the way they spend government resources.

Citizens' behaviour and social capital

H_3: Stated that citizens' behaviour is significantly and positively related to social capital. This implies that the existence of citizens' behavioural characteristics of ownership of public resources, participation and assertiveness can provide ground for socialising, networking and building bonds. Again, citizens who regard public resources as community-owned property participate in matters such as budget consultative meetings. This presents common ground to on which to coordinate to build massive force needed to mount pressure on public officers to be responsible for the management of public resources. However, some communities and even citizens are individualistic and pay more attention to privately-owned resources without bothering to participate in community proceedings like village forums (Barazza) that would be mediums for accountabilities. Such publics tend to have weak social capital which is detrimental to discussions pertaining to noble objects. A society with stronger social capital is a society of shared values and can achieve any goal for the common good for such a society. Social capital operates on the belief, as once expressed by Hellen Adam Keller that: "*Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much*". This study finding is in line with Putnam (1993); Coleman (1988, 1990) asserts that people who embrace social structures are willing to subordinate their personal interests to those of larger society. These findings contradict Healey (1999) who argued that citizen behaviour does not relate to social capital because network is a misnomer and not applicable to chaotic situations.

Social capital mediates relationship between citizens' behaviour and accountability

The study sought to establish whether social capital mediates the relationship between citizens' behaviour and accountability. Social capital was found to partially mediate this association. The hypothesis (H_4) is thus supported. Bootstrapping was selected over other methods like Sobel tests and the casual steps approach to test for mediation mainly because despite the complex and existence of multiple paths within a model, its

extrapolation is based on the indirect effect between the predictor and dependent variable, respectively (Preacher, Derek, & Hayes, 2007). Mediation is assumed to exist if there is a difference between Standardized Total Effects and Standardized Direct Effects. In this study, mediation exists for the hypothesized relation because there was a difference between Standardized Total Effects and Standardized Direct Effects for social capital as a mediator in the relationship between citizens' behaviour and accountability as seen in Table 3.

Our central aim of this research was to examine social capital as a mediator of the relationship between citizens' behaviour and accountability. We predicted and confirmed that social capital mediates the relationship between citizens' behaviour and accountability (partial mediation). This implies that social capital acts as a conduit in the association between citizens' behaviour and accountability. This mediated hypothesis was confirmed through Bootstrap Significance Testing of Mediation. This means that strong behaviour reflects when citizens show interest in tracking the status of public resources. This is better done through networking and creating social bonds among citizens which improves accountability. This resonates well with Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) who argued that when citizens generate social capital, they become well placed to resist individualism and embrace citizen behaviour that fosters accountability.

Implication of the study

The study was based on social capital theoretical review that provides the conceptualization of the construct of social capital as a mediator between citizen behaviour and accountability. The research results provide theoretical evidence of the link between citizens' behaviour and social capital in predicting accountability and particularly social capital mediating this association. Past studies have paid less attention to this mediating effect especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa. This research bridges this gap by using data from local governments in Uganda.

Table 3. Total, direct and indirect effects.

Standardized Total Effects		
	Citizens behaviour	Social capital
Social capital	.288***	.000
Accountability	.522***	.162***
Standardized Direct Effects		
Social capital	.288***	.000
Accountability	.475***	.162***
Standardized Indirect Effects		
Social capital	.000	.000
Accountability	.047***	.000

Management of civil society organisations may need to redevelop sensitization programmes to popularize citizens' mindset shift to recognise social capital as another resource, though intangible, for improving accountability at local governments. The effort should help eliminate communication barriers among citizens, build their assertiveness and improve participation in public resource management processes.

The quantitative approach was adopted, neglecting qualitative methodology. The views of respondents, which would have informed us of the reasons why respondents held certain views about citizen behaviour, social capital and accountability, were neglected. In addition, the study adopted a cross-sectional approach. This implies that the views of individuals that change over time were not considered. The same study should be conducted using the longitudinal approach. The opinion leaders in the society whom citizens look up to for guidance should encourage citizens to embrace behavioural change to regain lost hope given the plausible evidence that through their behaviour they can improve accountability and service delivery in local governments. Citizens should be encouraged to learn to withstand intimidation by authorities who want to take away their social capital resource and make them impulsively submissive like subjects rather than citizens. The authorities know social capital is the resource that can be used to rally different individuals to channel their efforts towards pressing them to comply with accountability laws and regulations.

Policy on citizens' engagement in accountability should be reviewed to make it more impactful so that more than just participation of presence should be considered. Government officers should embrace mindset change and consider citizens as partners in the development process given that citizens are now informed of their capability to influence accountability through behaviour. Public officers need to scale up and accept to improve accountability to avoid eminent pressure mounting on them from citizens who can converge to fight for transparency.

Conclusion

The study concludes that social capital mediates the relationship between citizens' behaviour and Accountability in local governments of the sub-Saharan country of Uganda. This means that we can rely on citizens' behaviour to predict accountability when social capital is embraced by way of networking, bridging and bonding. By citizens taking ownership of public resources, they can play a critical role in scaling up demand for accountability. Resources which are not

owned tend to be cared for less. This study advocates ownership as a first move for citizens to embrace to cause change needed to improve accountability. The sense of ownership becomes the driving force for citizens to raise critical questions as they demand update each time the public property is acquired or disposed.

Using a participatory approach, citizens can create impactful change to accountability in local governments. In the process of participation, they can demand to be sensitized on new projects coming up in the local governments on which to contribute ideas according to local realities in the community outside the perspective of public officers. Budget discussion meetings with public officers provide an important avenue for citizens to create impact and influence accountability dynamics. It is during the debates during budgeting that public involvement process kicks off accountability. Through assertiveness, citizens demonstrate their case as they confidently engage public officers on their aspirations as citizens for their local government. By harnessing social capital through the use of social media network, citizens can share information real-time and make it difficult for public officers to operate in a non-transparent manner, hence improving accountability in local governments.

Limitations

Being cross-sectional, this study could not enable us to explain a change in behaviour of those entrusted with public funds in regard to accountability over time. As a result, the study handled only one-time information that may not account for variation in accountability over a long time. Secondly, the study was carried out in a single accountability community setup of local governments. This makes the results less applicable in other accountability setups. Lastly, since the study was carried out in Uganda, its application beyond the jurisdiction of Uganda needs to be done cautiously.

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