

Problematizing News Media Ownership Patterns in Kenya: Who Controls Media Industry in the Global South?

Michael Otieno Otieno¹; Michael M. Ndonge²

¹Media Scholar, Egerton University, Kenya

²Lecturer, Kabarak University, Kenya

Corresponding author email motieno@lasalle.org

Abstract

The main aim of this paper is to investigate media ownership patterns and analyse the implications of such patterns in Kenya—while thinking globally. Notably, media industry has attracted politicians and business tycoons around the world. It is one of the most lucrative industries that come with a lot of power and influence. From the literature reviewed in this analysis, it is evident that very few studies have been done to critically look at the media ownership patterns in Kenya and the implications such ownership have in the media market place. The paper is aimed at answering three questions. 1) What has been the media ownership pattern in Kenya since independence? 2) What does media ownership patterns mean to the Kenyan Media industry? 3) How does this pattern in Kenya compare to the rest of the world? Analysis from this research seems to demonstrate that most media outlets in Kenya are either politically owned or have some political agenda attached to them. As a result of such pattern, the Kenyan media experience narrow content and lack of alternative viewpoint of news and information disseminated to the public. Secondly, there is lack of balance since the main aim of the media is to advance political agenda as opposed to being the fourth estate—that watchdogs the government on behalf of the society. The findings also indicate that there are similarities in media ownership in Kenya and those around the world. When the political class owns the media, its normative roles are compromised, the editorial independence is skewed, and the media loses its impact as a cultural institution. The recommendation is that only community media can undo the pattern that is being established by politically owned media industry.

Key Terms: Media ownership patterns, global south, news media industry

How to cite this article in APA (6th Edition)

Otieno, M, O & Ndonge, M.M. (2020). Problematizing News Media Ownership Patterns in Kenya: Who controls Media Industry in the Global South? *Editon Cons. J. Media Commun. Stud.*, 2(1), 75-83.

Introduction

Media remains the most influential cultural industry in the 21st century. As a result, owning news media or any other form of mass media is a highly lucrative business. Historically, ownership of media in Kenya has been shifting from the Christian organisation that launched it to the political class and corporate persons. Notably, print media was the very first form of media in Kenya. As early as 1895, the Christian missionary society launched the Taveta chronicles. A few years down the line, the Church of Scotland and finally the Catholic Church started publishing newspapers. According to Nyanjom (2012), this was the genesis of media presence in Kenya.

In 1901, the East African Standard was launched but then died four years down the line. Shortly after, it was taken over by colonial interests who then used it as the means to perpetuate western interests and ideologies. Years later, the Asian communities in Kenya started gaining interest in media. Their publication was for their consumption. Towards 1950, there were several papers that were published by both individual and corporate persons. This became restricted at some point in the mid-1950s. The nation media group was launched by the Aga Khan to counter the standard that was viewed as Anti-African. At Independence, foreigners owned mainstream media in Kenya (Nyanjom, 2012). In the 1970s and 80s, was the period most mainstream media emerged. Both the Weekly Review and daily Nairobi Times came in to. A lot changed when former president Moi rose to power. Interference of media was at the pick. Today, owning a media outlet is not a big deal. Provided one has the financial and political power then they can own the media. Political power is significant because the media licensing especially radio has been regulated by the government.

Media Ownership Patterns

In Canada, organisations own most media outlets. In the United Kingdom (UK), the situation is not very different

from that of Canada. According to Blidook (2009), there is a common trend of ownership of media organisations in the developed world. Most of these organisations practice what is known as cross-ownership where one organisation owns more than one type of media outlet. Canwest Global Communications Corporation; a major media conglomerate, for example, owns most media outlets in Canada. The organisation owned the Global television network and several other newspapers in Canada. Blidook describes CanWest's various media outlets as:

CanWest currently owns the largest component of newspapers in Canada with 13 dailies, 126 community papers, as well as internet assets, and its television network. It is also part owner of a television network in Australia and Alliance Atlantis Communications in the U.S. (, 2009, p. 57).

In Nigeria, different levels of government, which comprise of the state and the federal governments, serving as well as retired high-level private and public officials, politicians and powerful businessperson own most of the media organisation in Nigeria. This makes the West African country media ownership similar to that of Kenya. According to Okwuchukwu's (2014) analysis, these groups of people (the ruling elite) are the core "newsmakers" whose views and opinions populate most of the views, news, opinions, and information disseminated in the media in Nigeria.

The owners set the agenda and highlight the issues they want the public to concentrate on for a given duration of time. This ownership pattern, as well as the numerous media control policies in Nigeria, has to some extent hindered the media from independently setting the societal agenda. Basic local news mostly originates from these ruling class or as they are often called, "the newsmakers". This class of individuals includes politicians, business executives, captains of industry, top civil servants and other influential members of the ruling elite whose views

and opinions dominate daily news and public information in Nigeria. This class of individuals controls the media in Nigeria (Okwuchukwu, 2014).

According to Littlejohn and Foss (2009), those who own the media to some extent have the power to set the media agenda. Media owners can dictate and influence the editorial policies, which then informs the gathering, packaging, and dissemination of information to the public. This means that they decide what goes to the public and what remains buried. Littlejohn and Foss (2009) went on to highlight that media legitimisation of events and important issues affect the audiences' perception of reality. The news media priorities latter became the priorities that the audience give much attention. This is why politicians and powerful businesspersons in Kenya have opted to venture into the media business and this research paper aimed at investigating the implications that this ownership pattern has on news media.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive research design to describe the patterns of media ownership in Kenya and compared them with those in other countries around the Globe. The researchers opted for this method since it is the best method in gathering a large amount of data that can be used for future reference. The researchers used thematic analysis to analyse the obtained data. Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The theme is "a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data relevant to the research question (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p. 121). Thematic analysis is a flexible research tool, which can provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). On the interpretation of themes, the researcher interpreted the data by reading and re-reading the coded categories so as to identify related patterns in relation to the research questions. Emerging themes and patterns were also

identified and categorised. The findings were then discussed and the conclusion drawn.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Industry in Kenya

The media industry in Kenya has witnessed tremendous growth in the past few years brought about by transformative growth of newspapers, magazines, radio stations as well as television stations (Mulupi, 2012). There are many FM radio stations in Kenya both local and regional. In terms of the market share, Kiswahili stations remain at the top with the market share of 43 percent followed by English radio stations at 33 percent then the vernacular stations are at 24 percent.

In the television industry, Citizen TV remains the most commonly watched station followed by KTN home, and then KTN News and NTV come in the fourth position (Geopoll, 2019, 2020). Other players include K24, Maisha Magic East, KBC, Inooro TV, Kiss TV, and Switch TV respectively. According to GeoPoll's analysis, the remaining minor television stations in Kenya control the remaining 19 percent of the market share. Mulupi (2012) asserts that the media enterprise in Kenya is one of the vibrant industries in East Africa and one that keeps attracting numerous business magnates in the region. According to Oriare, Orlale and Ugangu (2010), most print publications in Kenya use English as their primary language of communication, with few using Kiswahili in their publication. However, things have changed in the recent past. According to GeoPoll analysis of 2019:

Kiswahili remains the preferred language of broadcast nationally, and across different age groups, it is observed that 46 percent of radio share for listeners aged 35 years is from stations broadcasting in Kiswahili. Vernacular stations command the second-highest listenership amongst older listeners aged 35 years and over, having a 38

percent share. However, we do observe some differences by age group, finding that older listeners are more likely to listen to Kiswahili or vernacular stations, with only 16 percent of those aged 35 and older listening to English stations. By contrast, 33 percent of audience share for the youth age group (15-24 years old) is for English-language stations (Okulo, 2019, Para 5).

According to GeoPoll analysis of February 2019, Radio Citizen was the leading station with 13 percent market (audience) share followed by Radio Maisha with 10 percent and Radio Jambo in third place with 9 percent shares all of which broadcast in Swahili language.

Media ownership in Kenya

In the analysis of Odipodev (2018), most mainstream media outlets in Kenya are either owned by politicians or are closely affiliated to some powerful political class in Kenyan society (Mulupi, 2012). This offers them the power to control the masses and manipulate the people particularly during election periods (Gafra, 2012). A few media companies own most of these radio stations. They include Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, Nation Media Group, Standard Media Group, Radio Africa Group, Royal Media Service, and MediaMax Communication Group.

Most politicians who own media outlets in Kenya often prefer to use the names of their parents, relatives, friends as well as spouses and partners in the registration of these companies. This makes it extremely difficult to actually point out directly who owns these media organisations. Nyanjom (2012) posits that Uhuru Kenyatta owns the MediaMax but his details are lacking in the ownership records. “Therefore, it is factually true that he owns the MediaMax but legally untrue because his name doesn’t appear anywhere in any legal documents of registration” (Nyanjom, 2012).

Royal Media Services (RMS) is the largest private national broadcaster with countrywide coverage; owning majority of vernacular radio stations and broadcasting in English and Swahili as well. There are also a dozen private radio and television stations that have ranges are limited to the Nairobi area (Mulupi, 2012). Kenya’s state-owned Kenya Broadcasting Corporation broadcasts in English, Swahili and various vernacular languages. These media, as indicated by the Geopoll surveys control the news media industry alongside others.

However, radio remains the most accessible broadcast media in Kenya as is elsewhere in the world. Notably, the invention of radio in 1920 was the onset of mass media and was vetted as the best mean of communication because of its ability to reach a wider audience spread over a vast geographical location (Nyanjom, 2012).

Owning media in Kenya has become one of the most lucrative businesses that have attracted politicians, church organisations as well as business persons. It obviously pays well and many would wish to venture into enterprises that pay. Generally, looking at those who know media in Kenya, majority of them if not all are wealthy. The likes of SK Macharia who owns the Royal Media Services had a humble beginning but over the years, his media organisation has grown to be one of the largest media outlets in Kenya with its citizen TV being the most-watched television stations in Kenya (Matara, 2017; Geopoll, 2019).

To the political class and business magnates who are politically inclined, ownership of media comes with the power to control the masses and get favour from the political class. Some politicians have directly used their media for elections campaigns. For instance, Ali Mwakwere, a politician from the coastal region of Kenya owns Kaya FM, which he aggressively used when he was trying to regain his political seat as a member of parliament for Matuga Constituency in a by-election held on July 12th

2010 (Gafla, 2012). No wonder many politicians want to have control of news media outlets because it gives them an upper hand during electoral campaigns.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Comparative Analysis of Media Ownership Patterns

The pattern of media ownership in Kenya in comparison with most countries in Europe and in the United States of America is completely different. The case is not different in most African countries.

Nigeria: The government, the public or the private sector owns both the print and electronic media in Nigeria. According to Okwuchukwu (2014), the print media, electronic media as well as the new media in Nigeria have different origins. However, the pattern of ownership of these media is similar. In Kenya, the pattern of media ownership is a little different from that of Nigeria. The government owns few media outlets under Kenya broadcasting corporation in Kenya while the rest of the media is privately owned.

USA and France: In the United Kingdom, for instance, Media conglomerates own most media outlets (Doyle, 2002). However, different countries that make up the European Union have different policies that defined the ownership pattern models. France, for instance, has rules and policies that limit monomedia ownership in the television, radio and press sectors and the case is not very different in Italy as per Doyle's (2002) analysis:

Ownership of the press in France is limited by rules that prevent anyone from controlling titles that account for in excess of 30 percent of the daily newspaper market (CE, 1996: 25). Likewise, in Italy, national legislation prevents any individual or company from controlling a market share of more than 20 percent of the national press or 50 percent in any given region. Kenya has got no strict rules

pertaining to the percentage of media ownership (Doyle, 2002, p. 149).

Canada: According to Oriare et al. (2010), most media owners in Kenya are politicians and private businesspersons who own and control most media organisations. Most of these businesspersons who own media in one way or the other have some political interests. While politicians who own the media in Kenya uses them for political purposes (Gafla, 2012). The situation is completely different in Canada since most media organisations in Canada are owned by the organisation, which have no political interest, but strictly business. The situation in Canada is similar to that in Australia and New Zealand where powerful companies control most media outlets (Blidook, 2009).

2. Media Concentration and Cross-Ownership

The tendency towards media concentration and cross-media ownership in Kenya is very similar to those around the world. The Royal Media Services, for instance, has 2 TV stations i.e. Citizen TV, Inooro TV, 14 radio stations, 12 of which are vernacular meant to cover the diverse cultures across the region and a Video on Demands platform commonly known as Viusasa. The radio stations include; Radio Citizen, Vuuka FM, Ramogi FM, Inooro FM, Chamegi FM, Musyi FM, Muuga FM, Sulwe FM, Bahari FM, Mulembe FM, Wimwaro FM, Hot 96 and Egesa FM. (Citizen Home, 2020). Another fast-growing and dynamic media company in Kenya is Radio Africa Group; this group has 6 national radio stations, one TV station, and a national newspaper. They include Kiss 100, Radio Jambo, Classic 105, Relax FM, X FM, East FM, The Star newspaper, and Kiss Television (Radio Africa group, 2020).

By the end of 2019, Kenya Broadcasting Cooperation has over 20 radio stations. NMG owns seven newspapers i.e. Daily nation, the East African, Business Daily, Daily Monitor, Taifa Leo, Mwana spoti among others, with several

magazines. In the broadcast, the NMG has NTV and Spark TV. The group also has 2 FM stations; Dembe FM and K FM. In addition to that, the group also has digital platforms such as Nairobi news; Swahili Hub, Nation mobile, and Kenya buzz (Nation Media Group [NMG], 2020). The SG, on the other hand, owns 3 radio stations; Radio Maisha, Spice FM, and Vybez radio. They also own KTN News and KTN Home and 3 news newspapers (The Standard Group [SG], 2020). Regional Reach owns Kameme FM, K24 TV, and the local franchise for GTV.

Some media conglomerates around the world own almost all media globally. In 1984, fifty independent media companies owned the majority of media interests within the United States. As of the year 2019, five media conglomerates controlled 90 percent of the media in the United States. They include Comcast (via NBC Universal), Disney, Viacom and CBS (both controlled by National Amusements), and AT&T (via Warner Media). These organisations own several media outlets and have a huge control of media content in the United States. In Asia, Sony, a media conglomerate that owns the largest music entertainment business in the world is one of the largest publishers of video games in the world. Sony is also one of the leading manufacturers of electronic products and a leading player in the film and television entertainment industry. According to Audiopedia (2017), Canada, Australia, and New Zealand also experience the concentration of multiple media enterprises in a few companies. This concentration gives them the power to control the media. Cross-media ownership can affect the content as well as the editorial policies of various media outlets.

DISCUSSION

In a study carried out by Simiyu in 2013 to find out whether the media owners of privately held media organisations in Kenya influenced the framing of news stories relating to the International Criminal Court's confirmation of charges

hearings against Uhuru Kenyatta, using a descriptive content analysis of nation, standard and the people's daily newspaper. The findings indicated that the framing used by the people daily was favorable to Uhuru Kenya as compared to the nation and the standard newspapers. Considering that he owned Mediamax that publishes the people daily, the obvious conclusion will be that the owners of the media organisation to some great extent have the power to control the content (Simiyu, 2013). The royal media group, which is owned by Macharia alongside numerous vernacular radio stations in Kenya, can to some extent, have control of what is and what is not to be broadcast.

With the cross-ownership of media outlets in Kenya, the media content is very narrow. Media outlets develop the tendencies of sharing content thereby leading to a lack of alternative viewpoints of news and information disseminated to the public. Radio stations associated with the royal media services, for example, share news stories among themselves, making the audience lack an alternative view of reality. The audience view of society is becoming narrower and narrower each day.

PROSPECTS FOR MEDIA OWNERSHIP PATTERNS IN KENYA

Political media ownership in Kenya has resulted in a lack of balance and objectivity in journalism. The aim of most of these media outlets is to drive the political agenda of individuals who own them. Privately owned media outlets in Kenya with some political affiliation are vehicles for driving political propaganda; which affects the news media greatly. Moreover, competitive market pressure and the need for sustainability of media organisation is on the rise. Advertisements being the primary source of finance to most media outlets today, they have the power to dictate when and where their adverts should be placed.

Therefore, educative programs will soon lack the place in the media programming for the mere fact that they do not

generate any income. From the evidence pertaining to the impact of political media ownership in Kenya, it is undoubtedly that the media will soon allow all manner of adverts to run which will intern corrode the media culture and in the end, render media organisation a complete fiasco in promoting cultural integrity.

To say the least, the current media ownership pattern in Kenya has resulted in the hyper-commercialisation of media organisations. The effectiveness of editorial policies that are aimed at guiding journalists and media personnel in the gathering and disseminating of news seems flux. The belief that everything in the media should generate income is one powerful thing that can easily affect the quality of media content. If this trend continues, then the media content in the future will be very shallow.

Moreover, hybridisation of media will soon affect the Kenyan media a great deal. With this pattern of media ownership on the rise in Kenya, the media moguls will continue to perpetuate this trend. It will soon get to a point where the audience will be unable to differentiate and to draw a clear line between the programs meant to inform, those meant to educate and the ones meant to entertain.

The tabloidisation of media content is one real thing that is common in most media organisations in Kenya today. This trend has taken roots in most radio talk shows. Unfortunately, the trend is on the rise and eventually, it will get to a point where all media programs will be sensationalised. This will result in shallow content where important news stories will be blocked from reaching the limelight. Many people will lose trust with the mainstream

media, and to replace that, the majority will turn to the ghetto press

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

It is time for Kenyan communities to start thinking of the need for community media. According to Howley (2010), community media refers to any form of media that is created, owned, programmed and function in the service of the community. The focus should be geared towards addressing communal concerns and challenges. UNESCO, on the other hand, defines community media as “independent, not-for-profit, and governed by and in the service of the communities they serve” (UNESCO, n. d., para. 1). In the absence of community media outlets, the politicians will use their privately-owned media outlets in perpetuating their personal political agendas.

Notably, community media is confused with existing vernacular media in Kenya. Most people tend to confuse the two. The royal media services own vernacular radio stations across the country. These radio stations are not community media; they are privately owned media organisations propelling the ideologies of the owner and broadcasting in vernacular. On the other hand, community media are founded to address the issues that affect that particular community (Howley, 2010); and have nothing to do with the language of broadcast—the emphasis is on the issues they articulate and freedom from control of all forms and manifestations.

References

- Audiopedia. (2017, May 29). *What is media conglomerate? What does media conglomerate mean?Media conglomerate meaning* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPoq_E5LjAY
- Baker, E. C (2007). *Media concentration and democracy: Why ownership matters*. New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Blidook, K. (2009). Choice and content: Media ownership and democratic ideals in Canada. *The*
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research In Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. Retrieved from : <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735>
- Canadian Political Science Review* 3(2), 52-69. Retrieved from
- Citizen Home. (2020). Our brands. Retrieved from <https://www.royalmedia.co.ke/>
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching Thematic Analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26(2), 120-123. Retrieved from <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/21155>
- Doyle, G. (2002). *Media ownership: The economics and politics of convergence and concentration in the UK and European media*. London, United Kingdom: Sage Publication.
- Gafla. (2012). *A list of all the media houses owned by Kenyan politicians*. Retrieved from <http://www.ghafla.com/shocking-a-list-of-all-the-media-houses-owned-by-kenyan-politicians/>
- Howley, K. (2010). *Understanding community media*. Retrieved from <http://ayorek.org/files/References/Understandingpercent20Communitypercent20Mediaperc ent20- percent20Howley percent20- percent202010.pdf>
- <https://ojs.unbc.ca/index.php/cpsr/article/viewFile/135/183>
- Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. (Eds). (2009). *Encyclopedia of communication theory*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication
- Matara, V. (2017). *List of most watched TV stations in Kenya 2017*. Retrieved from <https://victormatara.com/list-of-most-watched-tv-stations-in-kenya-2017/>
- Mulupi, D. (2012). *Kenya's top five media moguls*. Retrieved from <https://www.howwemadeitinafrica.com/kenyas-top-five-media-moguls/17808/>
- Nation Media Group. (2020). *Media of Africa for African: Brands*. Retrieved from <https://www.nationmedia.com/brands/>
- Nyanjom, O. (2012). *Factually true, legally untrue: Political media ownership in Kenya*. Retrieved from https://internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews_FactuallyTrue_Legally_Untrue-MediaOwnership_Kenya2013-01.pdf
- Odipodev (2018). *The politics of media ownership in Kenya*. Retrieved from <https://www.theelephant.info/data-stories/2018/11/01/the-politics-of-media-ownership-in-kenya/>
- Okulo, A (2019). *Kenya TV and Radio Audience Data: GeoPoll Survey Reports, Media Audience Measurement*. Retrieved from <https://www.geopoll.com/blog/kenya-tv-radio-data-2019/>

- Okwuchukwu, O. G. (2014). The influence of media ownership and control on media agenda setting in Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, 1(7), 36-46. Retrieved from <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijhsse/v1-i7/5.pdf>
- Oriare, P., Orlale, R. O., & Ugangu, W. (2010). *The media we want: The Kenya media vulnerabilities study*. Retrieved from <http://www.awcfs.org/dmdocuments/books/MediaVulnerabilitiesStudy.pdf>
- Radio Africa Group. (2020). Radio Africa group: Broadcast media. Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/organization-guest/company/radio-africa-group?>
- Simiyu, T. F. (2013). Media ownership and framing in Kenya: A study of the ICC case against Uhuru Kenyatta. *Open Science Repository Communication and Journalism*. Retrieved from Online (open-access), e70081924. doi:10.7392/Research.70081924
- The Standard Group. (2020). More. Retrieved from <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/>
- UNESCO. (n.d.). *Community media sustainability policy series*. Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/community-media-sustainability/policy-series/defining>