

Internet Use by Mainstream Media in Kenya

Research paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the post-graduate diploma in Mass
Communication at the University of Nairobi
School of Journalism

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
EAST AFRICANA COLLECTION

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Declaration

This is to declare that this research is my original work and has not been presented for examination in any institution. Any views and opinions expressed in this paper are my responsibility and not those of the School of Journalism, University of Nairobi.

Signed:


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Date

25/11/02

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Dedication

To Goreti, for believing in me

To Jason, whom I live for

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The Internet can be described as an inter-connection of computers using the World Wide Web. The Internet is thus an information super-highway. This means that one can access information that is stored in a server located thousands of miles from his location.

Though difficult to pinpoint a specific time and happening that gave birth to the Internet as we know it, Ellsworth & Ellsworth (1994) have traced the origins of the Internet back to the United States in the 1960's. Following the Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik into the space in the late 1950's, the then United States of America president, Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered that there be established an Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA), to counter the threat that the Soviets posed with their new launch.

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The ARPA project drew the best minds in the US. It is here that the idea of sending information in the form of packets was first mooted as a way of making dissimilar computers able to communicate and establish a method that routed data through multiple communication paths using groups of data with their own destination addresses built in (packets). The system thus created connected various military and research sites to forestall the eventuality of a single nuclear strike damaging a central information nerve centre.

Though initially targeted for the military, the National Science Foundation (NSF), would later expand the use of this technology developed by ARPANET and a high-speed backbone network to allow campuses and research centres to use NSF's supercomputers.

Increasingly, the connections were used for e-mail and for transferring data and information files between sites. This is what came to be called the Internet.

In the 1980's and 1990's commercialisation of the Internet was seen as other networks communicating among themselves eased access for individuals who were not part of a government or educational institution.

The ability of the structure created is unlimited to traditional media ability. It can carry broadcast (one point to many points) narrowcast (one point to few points) inter-cast (one point to one point) and messages in any form (data, text, voice and image)

The Internet functions by information packets. The information is sent in the form of packets, which are relayed, to an *Internet service provider* with a link to the terrestrial satellites. The information is thereafter transmitted to the target *server*, which then releases the information that the user asked for. The released information is then transmitted back the same way as it went. The link up of different users is varied depending on the user's needs and resources. The individual user who has only one computer can gain access to the World Wide Web through the use of a telephone line. This line is then connected to a *modem* in the computer. The user then dials into the server of an Internet service provider for the Internet connection. The leased line client gains access into the Internet by the use of a dedicated line that is leased from an Internet service provider. This type of client has many computers.

The origins of web hosting goes back to the development of the Internet itself. It is difficult to tell when the first web page or web site was first hosted.

It is estimated that there are 242 million Internet users worldwide. The number of Internet users in Kenya is estimated at between 50, 000 to 70, 000 persons.

The local website hosting history can be tied down to the introduction of Internet in Kenya in 1995. There are very few websites that are hosted locally in Kenya. This is due to the poor connection speeds that exist in the country.

Most the major media houses in Kenya have realised the importance of Internet and as such all three of the media houses that we have examined in this study have websites. This is usually the first indication that the organisation has realised that the Internet is a resource that they should tap into.

Newspapers in the United States and Europe have been driven into establishing websites of their own in their effort to cope with declining frequency in readership, rising cover prices and flirting of advertisers with new media.

The Kenyan print media's attempt to keep pace with advancement in information technology came to fruition as the Nation Media Group launched the Nation' website in 1995 while the East African Standard followed suit in 1998. Both sites offered news, other current editorial matter and advertising. Before the turn of the century, several

websites sites belonging to media organisations were in existence i.e Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, Expressions Today (monthly media watch magazine), Sports Monthly, and Capital FM.

These sites are not however without problems, the most outstanding being the lack of serious returns. Only the Nation has any online advertising. Coupled with low access to the Internet by the populace (which in effect results in low advertising interest), the sole reason for their present venture seems to be the belief that news websites are necessary investments to ensure future growth and pre-empt competitive inroads.

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1.1. Statement of the Research Problem

Information and communication technologies are playing an important role in transforming society and reinforcing free flow of information. Some commentators have hailed the Internet as perhaps the most exciting innovation for journalists since the discovery of the fax and telephone. As an agent of change in society, it would seem natural for the media to quickly embrace the use of new technology that could ease the conveyance of information. The study seeks to know the following; what structures, in human and material resources has the media put in place to exploit opportunities available in the development of the information superhighway? A related issue was whether access to the Internet was related to the way the media in Kenya has gone about exploiting the new medium. How commercially developed are these sites?

1.2 Objective

There is little study on Internet usage in Kenya and much lesser of its exploitation by the media. This study can be rated as the first attempt to give a simple outlook, a description, of the extent to which mainstream media have embraced the Internet.

1.3 Scope and Limitation of Study

The objective of the project was to present the current status of Internet use. Owing to the limited time and resources, the decision was made to restrict the study to organizations that possessed websites dealing with news and current affairs. This was considered a demonstration of practical use.

Obviously, there are several other relevant issues e.g. the impact of the medium's low penetration on investment, attitudes governing change, reasons behind low advertiser interest, legal and ethical issues with regard to dissemination of online news without restriction to a country's borders, that beg to be looked into. However limited time and resources made it prudent that this project be developed as a starting point for other persons to explore the subject in better detail.

The phenomenon of online newspapers, magazines, and video programming will in the coming years be a reality in Kenya. Studies into these issues will help to guide growth and relevant policies

1.4 Study Hypotheses

The research hypothesized that mainstream media in Kenya used the Internet in its most basic form. This was manifested in the posting of a news website whose content was not specific to the net but derived off the parent company's newsgathering facilities.

The low level of internet use by the general public has led to simple methods of web use by the media i.e. repackaging mother station, paper news onto the website and lack of uniquely website tools to create active sites i.e. interactivity, message boards, polls, forums etc

The development of online advertising in Kenya is still in its nascent stages. So far, only the Nation has banner advertising on its website. E-commerce, a facility that allows users to make purchases over the web is non-existent.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

There is a dearth of literature relating to information technology in Kenya as a country and in the narrow confines of the mass media. This differs greatly from the developed world where fast development of the computer's use in almost every facet of life has prompted several studies on it. Within the media, these studies have tended to focus on legal and ethical issues at play in the conveyance of information through the Internet and the rights of those accessing. There is therefore, need to carry out a study of steps taken by Kenya's media who are formidable players in the development of the country's social, economic and political structures to exploit the advent of new forms of communication.

The linkage between access to information and development has been at the center of studies and discussions of the role played by the mass media in facilitating socio-economic advancement in the third world.

Polycarp Ochillo in his review of the significance of Information Technology says

“In this age of information superhighway and globalization, the economic imperatives, democratization processes in Africa, the respect for human rights and good governance are intrinsically linked to the role of information” (Expressions Today, Media Review No.22 October/November)

The advent of the Internet would most certainly become a huge topic with regard to the subject owing to its apparent lack of boundaries traversing physical borders, media

organizations and its ability to combine varied forms of communication from text, sound, video through broadband and;

“Expose people to new ideas, values from any part of the world at any time. Time and space become irrelevant when we talk about computer mediated technology”
(Srinivas and Liu 2000, Page 501)

However like most radical changes, the advent of the internet as a media outlet has created possibilities that need careful analysis with regard to its practical use and effects in segmented societies. Melkote and Liu (2000) in their study “Forging a pluralistic Integration” point out the danger of fragmentation posed by the new medium to less cohesive states.

The traditional mass media until now have played the role of binding people together with homogenous programming i.e. news, ideologies etc, that support a common cultural value. The two researchers in a cautious statement that can easily fit the Kenyan context point out that the new medium could be easily used to serve cultural minority groups and their access to news from a biased angle. The possibility of this eventuality cannot be doubted as examples abound of how FM radio can presently base their programming on religious and cultural menu.

Should public service broadcasters venture into online programming? Not so, according to some media activists. Their objections are based on the potential introduction of niche advertising due to the low penetration levels of the Internet, which can “reinforce the

sustenance of middle class exclusivity in creation of media styles and product packaging”(Hills & Michalis 2000). However it is also wrong to see the web simply as a means of transmission. While pointing out the latter risk, the two researchers list out invaluable areas that span the web’s use across a whole chain of programming i.e. listing service detailing programming, meet needs of minority groups or geographical regional not adequately covered by broadcasts. Charged with the role of fostering integration within a nation-state, the web could be the tool to “keep within the fold” citizenry abroad.

Areas of content are problematic when the traditional censorship is applied. One of the biggest issues on the net is pornography and homophobia. The public role of the Internet justifies efforts to regulate content. Most laws applied to the printing press, television and radio, are yet to be developed enough to cater for the growth of the new medium. But in their research Melkote and Liu (2000) point out the tricky questions: What type of public forum is the Internet? Whose territory does it fall in? Can you prevent it from being accessed in what you consider your territory? These are valid questions when you consider the fact that the traditional media’s dissemination of information caters for a known audience, in a defined area, with the availability of redress for people who might be aggrieved with the said information.

In his argument against installation of gadgets to block access to sites deemed unfavorable or indecent, Adam Clayton Powell III (2000) points out the dilemma and absurdity of trying to enforce the law of decency,

“So over and over, federal state and local government have tried to prohibit on the Internet, the same material you can buy at a well socked newsstand. And over and over again, courts have rule that words and pictures are just as permissible on the Internet as they are in print” (Media Studies Journal, Fall 2000, Pg 37))

Powell’s summation, legally valid, does not take away the merits of concern over sexist, racist, fanatical material that could be injurious to other people’s rights and freedoms.

Content aside, the great promise of the Internet will take time to replace traditional media in the conveyance of news. Even in the United States of America, the country that invented the Internet, web technology is far from perfect in terms of user friendliness. In her review of the US 2000 Presidential elections between Al Gore and George W. Bush, Elizabeth Weise (2000 Media Studies Journal) blasts the promise of 2000 elections as the year the Internet “will break through” to politics. This did not happen owing to;

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“Clunky technology...the database sometimes lacking crucial information, the links too often dead, the sites tedious” (Not Yet for the Net, Pg 37)

Still, other scholars feel the advent of the Internet presents a threat to the survival in the long run of the newspaper medium. According to Leo Bogart (2000, What’s Next?), Radio and Television were unable to supplant the newspaper owing to their overwhelming devotion to entertainment. In contrast, he says, the Internet deals in information and offers “unlimited amounts of it in unending fresh supply”.

Bogart's perception should definitely provide food for thought for media managers. However owing to problems in Internet technology, low user rates across the third world, high costs of internet connection and maintenance, its unlikely that the existence of Kenyan newspapers will be at risk any time soon.

Chapter 3 Methodology

The selection of the media organizations to be studied was based on the simple examination of whether the organization performed the following;

- Has a website
- Has resources to accomplish daily reporting
- Has access to at least 5 Kenyan provinces in combined properties
- Displays strength in terms of content i.e. regional, national, international news.

Three media organizations were then picked. These were;

Nation Media Group

East African Standard

Kenya Broadcasting Corporation

Data came from telephone calls and previous research material on the general state of Internet use in the country. I also surveyed the three organization's websites and made my own observations.

A twenty-one (21) item questionnaire was also sent to the 3 media organizations requesting general information on the Internet departmental set-up and functionality.

3.1 Operationalization:

This shall involve description of terms that relate to Internet use

Domain name - An Internet addressing system that involves a group of names that are listed with dots(.) between them in the order of most specific to general. In the US the top domains are network categories such as **edu** (education) **com**(commercial), and **gov** (government). In other countries, a two-letter abbreviation is used to denote territory such as **ke** (Kenya) **za** (South Africa) **uk** (United Kingdom)

Electronic Mail (e-mail)- Private messages delivered via networks to an individual's e-mail account. Used with automatic group mailing list software, this is the basis of many Internet services. "E-mail" is used both as a noun and a verb

Host - Your Internet access provider's computer. Refers to when you dial up using a modem to connect with the Internet access provider's host computer

Internet - A digital communications network connecting tens of thousands of smaller networks from most countries of the world. Started in the United States, it transfers data using a standardized protocol called TCP/IP

Modem - An electronic device that converts computer signals into audio (sound) signals so that they can be sent over normal phone lines and received by another modem that will convert the sound back into computer signals. Virtually all modems combine the send and receive functions in one circuit.

Network - A group of computers connected in any way that allows data to be sent between these computers

Online - Any activity carried out while your computer is connected to another computer or network

Unix - An operating system widely used on the Internet developed by AT & T Bell laboratories that supports multi-user and multitasking operations

WWW - Created in Switzerland, WWW is client, server software designed to use hypertext and hypermedia. It uses HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) to exchange documents and images.

3.2 Exploratory

In an attempt to understand the use of the Internet by Kenya's mainstream media, this study shall adopt an exploratory approach then give a descriptive summation of facts gathered. Babbie (1992:80) says an exploratory study is typical when a researcher is examining a new interest or when the study is itself relatively new and unstudied.

Owing to the relative newness of the medium, it is important that an exploratory study is carried out to give basic facts on the subject.

3.3 Sources of Data

Two main sources of data were used; primary and secondary. The first involved telephone inquiries, interviews with those running the Nation, East African Standard and Kenya Broadcasting websites.

In addition a brief questionnaire was used to collect data from the targeted organizations. This proved useful, as some of the information collected was not officially documented. Apart from the Nation which has a fully-fledged Internet department, the others were still in the process of building them up with little official structure.

I also relied on secondary data to obtain background information on the specifics to be looked out for in my research. A lot of useful studies have been conducted in the USA on the development of the Internet with regard to the media.

Chapter 4 Findings

Summary of Media Home Pages

SITE	FUNDING ORGANISATION	HOME PAGE FEATURES AND MAIN HEADINGS	REGIONAL/ COMMUNITY INPUT	GLOBALISATION/ OTHER LANGUAGES
www.nationaudio.com	commercial	National news headlines, commentaries, business headlines, features, sports, feedback from readers and weekly in-house magazines	Regional News provided through own news gathering teams, correspondents, KNA	English
www.eastandard.net	commercial	Regional and national news headlines, the social scene, horoscope, and weekly in-house magazines	Regional News provided through own news gathering teams, correspondents, KNA	English
www.kbc.co.ke	Public	National and international news headlines, sports and business.	International news items are provided by AFP and Reuters	English and Swahili

From our findings, the Nation Group can be classified as the leading media house in terms of resources geared towards the use of the Internet. Unlike, the other media houses that use dial-up connection, the Nation group has a full time connection to the Internet through a leased line connection.

The Nation Group has the largest Internet division in terms of personnel and resources followed by the Standard. Both have a budgetary allocation for the internet division. Within the KBC, persons reporting to the Editor in Chief handle the Internet duties. Though not a division, it has specified personnel to work in it.

All three organizations have the editorial policy controlled by the respective newsrooms that decide on the main stories of the day. However there exists some leeway with regard to the selection of local stories.

The generation of revenue through the websites is not well developed with only the Nation Group's site having paid for banners

NATION MEDIA GROUP WEBSITE

- The nation website was designed in-house in 1995.
- Hosting is done abroad
- The website has different pages for the different features. This gives a total of 8 pages.
- Nation uses sound for their radio. An audio file on the day's news events can be downloaded from the site.
- They have links to the *monitor* of Uganda and the *East African*, both of which are part of the Nation media group.
- The website is in English.
- There is no practice of e-commerce on the site.
- There is no classified page.

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Technical Functionality

- Nation has an Internet connection via a 64Kb leased line.
- The level of connection is a dedicated line
- The group uses a *Unix* system
- The group uses a server connected to a satellite link so they do not need a modem connection.

Human Resources

- The web department has 10 employees.
- The members of staff include web designers, and web editors plus also a sales team.
- All the members of staff have reached University level in their respective fields*.

The Web Master

- The Internet department handles the web master functions.
- They do not sit in the management meetings.
- The internet department has web editors who have a newsroom background
- The Internet department is a fully-fledged department and thus has a budgetary allocation. This department has a manager.

Functionality

- The website and stories are updated everyday.
- The website has all stories including lifestyle* (please point restriction to locals)*.
- The source of the nation website stories is the newspaper division. As such they draw from the reporters that they have in-house, KNA, Agencies etc.
- The stories are sourced from the editorial department where they will have already determined the day's headlines.
- The Internet department does not have photographers. They use photos from the editorial department.

Marketing

- The Nation website has 8 banners. This is usually the form of advertisement in the Internet.
- There is no comparison within the media industry in the form of prices as the field is not competitive.
- There are marketing personnel within the Internet department who focus on getting banner advertising on the site.
- There is no practice of e-commerce on the site.

THE EAST AFRICAN STANDARD WEBSITE

- The design for the Standard website was out-sourced .
- Hosting is done abroad
- The website has different pages for the different features. This gives a total of 6 pages.
- Standard does not use audio.
- They have links to the *Kenya community abroad* and the *yellowpageskenya*.
- The website is in English.
- There is no practice of e-commerce on the site.
- There is no classified page.

Technical

- Standard has an Internet connection via a dial-up line.
- The level of connection is a normal telephone line
- They use a windows system

Human Resources

- The web department has 6 employees.
- The members of staff include web designers, and web editors.
- Most the members of staff have reached University level in their respective fields.

The web Master

- The Internet department handles the web master functions.
- They do not sit in the management meetings.
- The internet department has web editors who have a newsroom background

Functionality

- The website and stories are updated everyday.
- The website has all stories including lifestyle*(restricted to locals)*.
- The source of the Standard website stories is the newspaper. As such they draw from the reporters that they have in-house, KNA Agencies etc.
- The stories are sourced from the editorial department where they will have already determined what are the headlines for that particular day.
- The Internet department does not have photographers. They use photos from the editorial department.

Marketing

- The Standard website has no commercial banners.
- There are no marketing personnel within the Internet department.
- There is no practice of e-commerce on the site.

THE KENYA BROADCASTING CORPORATION WEBSITE

- The design for the KBC website was out-sourced from Swift Global (Kenya) Ltd in 2000.
- Hosting is done abroad
- The website has different pages for the different features. In total the site has 17 pages.
- KBC does not use audio.
- They do not have links other sites.
- The website is in English and Swahili.
- There is no practice of e-commerce on the site.
- There is no classified page.

Technical

- KBC has an Internet connection via a dial-up line.
- The level of connection is a normal telephone line
- They use a windows system

Human Resources

- The web department has 3 employees who are newsroom staffers*.
- The members of staff are web editors.

The Web Master

- Swift Global (Kenya) Ltd handles the web master functions.
- They do not sit in the management meetings.
- The internet department has web editors who have a newsroom background

Functionality

- The website and stories are updated everyday.
- The website has all local national stories of relevance to an international audience.
- The source of the KBC website stories are the agencies such as KNA and AFP.
- The stories selected by the news team.
- The Internet department has a digital camera to loaded pictures on the site. Members of the unit take turns using it. They do not employ a photographer.

Marketing

- The KBC website has no commercial banners.
- There are no banners therefore we cannot compare prices.
- There are no marketing personnel within the Internet department.
- No e-commerce.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

It is important to note that generally the country as a whole is just waking up to the idea of the Internet. As such, the optimal use of this tool for either exchange of information or revenue generation has not been reached yet.

Much research has been conducted on the diffusion of innovation (Rogers, 1983; 1995). Rogers divides adopters into five groups of innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. In terms of this research, almost all of Kenya's mainstream media seem to be in the last three categories.

The Nation Media Group, from the research can be classified as the leading media house in resources geared towards the use of Internet. They are the only company in the media industry that has paid up advertisements on their website. The Standard newspapers come in second after the Nation media group in Internet resources. It has four computers for the Internet department and six members of staff to run this department. The Kenya Broadcasting Corporation has just started to spend on building up for Internet usage recently. They have out-sourced most of their operations for the website.

However it is clear that only the Kenyan media as far as exploitation of the web has done the minimum is concerned. The cause for the slow development provides a fascinating subject for further research. There is little doubt that the media in Kenya is yet to bring the old tools of journalism to bear on the new medium. In all the media houses, the Internet department is closely integrated to the newsrooms where stories are received and

synthesized. The web editors in most cases treat the venture as an extension of the newspaper's/TV newsroom. Interactive tools specific to the web i.e. chat forums, message boards, video streaming, games, creation of hyperlinks etc that are important in increasing customer loyalty, strengthen feedback have yet to be put to use.

The cost of accessing the net can still be regarded as prohibitive to the common man. In addition to the monthly fees charged by Internet Service Providers, one has to pay the telephone bill accruing from the duration of connection. Though not specifically pursued in this research, interviews with all three organizations confirm that this will remain an impediment to the development of the media's Internet divisions. The upshot of this observation is that the public and advertisers are yet to acknowledge the Internet as an alternative mass medium.

A related observation is on the absence of authoritative media watch statistics on the "hits" (number of visitors, page impressions etc) gathered per website. Kenya's influential Steadman Report is yet to document facts on the Internet. While we can only guess the impact of this on advertisers (whose effect on the media cannot be underestimated), it would be naïve not to relate the underdeveloped online advertising to the slow growth of online media. A visit to famous websites like Yahoo reveals their innovative acquisition of consumer information through questionnaires, application forms for e-mail addresses or weekly newsletters. This aggressive stance is what has spurred the growth of the Internet abroad.

Ultimately, Kenya's media organizations will have to decide on how seriously they would want to invest on the new medium. Websites are rated according to their ease of use, to the changes in their content and more importantly, their level of interactivity. This requires specific effort and goals. Obviously, growth will be enhanced when and if the websites are considered a distinct product rather than a spin-off off from what the media organizations offer in the newspaper, radio or television. The best way forward in the relationship between the media and the Internet is captured by Leo Bogart (2000, "Newspapers"),

“ The Internet can offer profitable opportunities to exploit the full range of copy or data you generate. It allows specific items of news and advertising to move selectively to the people who want it”.

In short develop the medium using its strong points.

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Questionnaire

A. Website design & Structure

1. What is shown on the homepage of your organization's website?
(Describe)
2. Was the website designed in-house or outsourced?
3. Who hosts your website?
4. How many levels are on the site?
5. Is the site linked to other sites?
6. Is there use of audio (sound) on the site?
7. What language is used?

B. Technical

8. What is the mode of connection?
9. What is the Level of Connection? (Choose one below)
i) Gateway ii) Dial-Up iii) Silp/PPP iv) Dedicated Lines
10. What kind of computer system does your organization use? (Choose one below)
i) Dos ii) Windows iii) Macintosh iv) OS/2 v) Workstation
vi) Unix vii) Minicomputer viii) mainframe

C. Human Resources

11. What size is your web department?
12. Who is in charge of the department?
13. Does the head of the web department sit in management meetings?
14. Does the department have a budgetary allocation?

D. Functional

15. What is the frequency of updating website stories?
16. Where are stories sourced?
17. Do the Webmaster exercise editorial powers in selection of stories?
18. Does the web division have reporter/photographers?

E. Marketing

19. Does your website have any advertisement?
20. How many marketing personnel are attached to the web department?
21. Is there practice of e-commerce?